ITED STATES $1.00 GREAT BRITAIN 6/- FRANCE NF. 3.50 ITALY - LIRE 400

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
SHL
15 APR 1970
WITHDRAWN
LIBRARY

# THE TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW 6

# The Transatlantic Review

*Number 6 Spring 1961*

LONDON AND NEW YORK

*EDITORIAL OFFICES*

LONDON 33 Ennismore Gardens, S.W.7
NEW YORK 17 821 Second Avenue, and Box 3348, Grand Central Station.

*MANAGING EDITOR*

J. F. MCCRINDLE

*POETRY EDITOR*

GEORGE GARRETT

*ASSOCIATE EDITORS*

ELLIS AMBURN

ROBERT BAGG

WILLIAM GOLDMAN

RUBY MILLAR

JONATHAN PRICE

JEAN-CLAUDE VAN ITALLIE

EUGENE WALTER

CADE WARE

THE TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW is published quarterly at 821 Second Avenue, New York, 17, N.Y. Subscription $ 3.50 a year. Single copy $ 1. Distributor: BERNARD DE BOER, 102 Beverly Road, Bloomfield, New Jersey.
Issue Number 6 published April 1961.
Application for second-class mail privileges is pending at New York, N.Y.

*Printed in Holland at the Ysel Press, Deventer, P.O. Box 74*
*© Joseph McCrindle, 1961. All rights reserved*

# contents


| | |
|---|---|
| *William Faulkner.* Albert Camus | Page 5 |
| *Henry Van Dyke.* Ruth's Story | 6 |
| *Shirley W. Schoonover.* The Star Blanket | 19 |
| Drawings by Eugene Berman | 40 |
| with a note by Eugene Walter | |
| Big Doings; poem by Peter Viereck | 45 |
| *Richard Romain.* The Gypsy Girl | 47 |
| *John W. Malone.* A Domestic Scene | 59 |
| Poems adapted from the German of Walther | |
| von der Vogelweide by Raymond Oliver | 62 |
| Poems by George MacBeth | 63 |
| Poems by Marge Piercy | 66 |
| Poems by Paul Ramsey | 68 |
| *Jeremy Brooks.* Christmas with Sir Henry | 70 |
| *Mary Cecil.* Growing Pains | 95 |
| *Diana Gardner.* The Picnic | 103 |
| *Alfred Andersch.* Results of a Shock | 112 |
| *David Hughes.* The Coloured Cliffs | 122 |
| *Janice Elliott.* A Question of Identity | 132 |
| *E. M. Cioran.* Luther; a portrait | 138 |
| Notes on contributors | 141 |
| Six drawings of New York | between |
| Notes on the painters by Robert Dash | pp 142 & 3 |

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/transatlantic-review-1924_spring-1961_6

# Albert Camus

by William Faulkner

Camus said that the only true function of man, born into an absurd world, is to live, be aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom. He said that if the only solution to the human dilemma is death, then we are on the wrong road. The right track is the one that leads to life, to the sunlight. One cannot unceasingly suffer from the cold.

So he did revolt. He did refuse to suffer from the unceasing cold. He did refuse to follow a track which led only to death. The track he followed was the only possible one which could not lead only to death. The track he followed led into the sunlight in being that one devoted to making, with our frail powers and our absurd material, something which had not existed in life until we made it.

He said, 'I do not like to believe that death opens upon another life. To me, it is a door that shuts.' That is, he tried to believe that. But he failed. Despite himself, as all artists are, he spent that life searching himself and demanding of himself answers which only God could know; when he became the Nobel laureate of his year, I wired him, 'On salut l'âme qui constamment se cherche et se demande.' Why did he not quit then, if he did not want to believe in God?

At the very instant he struck the tree, he was still searching and demanding of himself; I do not believe that in that bright instant he found them. I do not believe they are to be found. I believe they are only to be searched for, constantly, always by some fragile member of the human absurdity. Of which there are never many, but always somewhere at least one, and one will always be enough.

People will say he was too young; he did not have time to finish. But it is not *How long,* it is not *How much;* it is, simply, *What.* When the door shut for him, he had already written on this side of it that which every artist who also carries through life with him that one same foreknowledge and hatred of death, is hoping to do: *I was here.* He was doing that, and perhaps in that bright second he even knew he had succeeded. What more could he want?

A translation of this piece into French appears in the number of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* dedicated to Albert Camus.

# Ruth's Story

by Henry Van Dyke

Merijean Wallenstein came out of the bathroom with Pink Ice on her face. Thousands of busy fingers, just as advertised, began to go to work around her tiny chin. 'Darling,' she said to Ruth, 'you know something, I'd like something metaphysical to happen to me, nothing metaphysical's ever happened to me and it's sad-making.'

Ruth rolled down a stocking over her heavy leg and looked up at her roommate. Merijean, oh Lord, was going to be pretentious again. Her little pygmy brain was tiresome at any time, but no, not today, not in all this hot weather. And all that Pink Ice was just as bad. Hot-looking, needless.

'Ruth?' Merijean threw *Movie Life* on the sofa and tucked her vain little red lips into a pout. 'What's all the gloom for? You've been gloomy ever since you got home.'

Stockingless, Ruth Schwartz's feet were cooling. The August heat, always worse on West 74th Street than any place in town, climbed from the floor to strike her in the face. 'Tired,' she said, and then, pulling at the thick black hair around her neck, she said, 'no, it's not only that entirely, it's that nun, that damned nun.'

*'Nun?'*

'Oh, she wasn't fooling anybody, I can tell you that, but what gets me, what really gets me is how she can get away with it.'

'Love, the heat's making you terribly cryptic. What's eating you?'

Ruth got out of the chair, in four movements, pulling at the damp brassiere strap wetting her shoulder, and waving her hand in the stubborn air. 'The nun, the nun, the false nun begging on 42nd Street! Merijean, I've never seen anything more disgusting. And I don't think there is. You know what, you could *see* that woman's heels. *High, high* heels, a mile high. Frilly. Except all filthy and old. And toeless! And this awful woman, this vile woman had the nerve, the gall, – Ruth's hand stabbed the hot air, and held it there, and dropped it to her thigh.

She turned sharply when she heard Merijean's silly laughing, bad laughing, like a chorus girl's, all tinsel and cellophane. 'You mean the 42nd Street nuns? Around Eighth Avenue? Oh, really, darling, you mean you've never seen them out before?' Merijean giggled, reached for a cigarette, her Pink Ice drying. 'With their grubby habits and

grubby nails, and grubby little blood shot eyes? They *are* heaven, aren't they? *Ter*ribly heaven.'

Ruth Schwartz stood still; it would have been very easy to slap her, slap Merijean's pampered little vain face. 'I don't think it's funny. Not even a little bit. It's . . . it's . . .'

'It's what, darling?' Merijean hopped up from the chair, rolled her body on a mannequin hip, flicked ashes from her cigarette the way she'd seen Bette Davis do it in a movie.

Even in an argument, Merijean had to be dramatic, vain with all that skinniness she tried to make pass as slim. Anybody could be skinny and unhealthy if they wanted to eat salads and take pills and massage flesh half of the day and night. Even in high school, back in Wilkinsburg, years before they met again and became roommates in New York – even *then* Merijean was buying lotion and pills and impractical clothes and frills like every other bird-brain female. Even then she was throwing herself at men just like she did last week with Bernie Kaye who God knows was an intellectual and he'd soon see quick enough what Merijean was made of. She'd manage to spoil him, though. Probably even sleep with him. There certainly wasn't any question about Merijean's being a virgin or not.

'It's *what,* darling?' Merijean had spread her skinny shoulders back into a ridiculous posture she'd seen in a fashion magazine, showing just how little bust she really did have. 'Huh? Oh, Ruth, honestly, you'll never get Wilkinsburg out of you, will you?'

Ruth sat down and turned the radio dial to WNCN. 'I still say it's wrong.'

'Wrong? Wrong?' Merijean nearly danced around the room in her Midgie panties and Playtelle bras. 'It may be, darling, but everybody's money-oriented in this town.'

Ruth turned up the volume to the Schumann symphony. Money-oriented, indeed; Merijean never heard that word until last week, and she still probably didn't know what it meant.

'*Every*body begs for *something* in one way or the other,' she said. 'All right, I'll grant you, it's crude, I admit it, but, Love, it's part of the scheme of things, I mean, of all the pure, premeditated, distilled *sin* in New York, this is *nothing*. In fact, it's funny.'

Schumann whirled around Ruth's dark head as she watched Merijean's Pink Ice drying. On the street, the evening sun stood on the pavement, and in the room it was hot, and August, and hot, so hot. 'Merijean,' Ruth said, 'it is not funny. It's false, Merijean. It's vulgar and it's a disgrace – to the Catholic Church.'

Merijean picked up *Movie Life*, blew smoke to the ceiling as though she were a little fountain spewing up water. 'So you should worry about it, Love? Let the Catholics worry about it.'

'It's false,' Ruth said and walked, without much arch in her feet, from the room. In the kitchen, over a Birdseye package of broccoli, Schumann followed her, and sweat ran down her neck. 'It's false,' she said.

Bernie Kaye drove up after supper in a little blue MG and his pants were too tight and his jacket was too short and he focused his eyes so *hard* into a person's, but his strawberry hair was good to look at and he was intelligent. Just what he would find to talk about to Merijean was what she'd like to know. 'Come in. Merijean'll be ready in a minute, or at least she ought to be ready in a minute. Sit.'

His eyes were blue, blue as his MG, and as jaunty. 'Cigarette?' he offered. 'I'm sorry, but you know I've forgotten your name. Or maybe I never really caught it – the *noise* in that lobby last week was –'

'Ruth,' she said softly but it seemed like a thunder clap, saying it, and standing there in the middle of the floor. Why was she always standing in the middle of the floor?

'Of course, of course,' he lied, stretching to reach an ashtray, stretching, smiling, lying to her beautifully. 'I'm a dunce on names.'

Well, he certainly remembered Merijean's and God knows how loud the theater crowd was talking in that lobby last week and half the time Merijean mumbled, but on the other hand, the way she threw herself after him with her cigarette holder and silly Greenwich Village earrings in that lobby, with people watching it, too, well it's no wonder he could remember Merijean. 'It's Ruth Schwartz,' she said to him and sat down quickly. 'Bernard Kaye. I remember yours all right, you're Bernie Kaye.' She wanted to hit herself with a hard object for sounding so – so thick.

With his teeth, he held his cigarette in the center of his mouth and moved his lips dryly around it to speak: 'Can I take off this jacket?' he asked, standing to peel off his Wash 'N Wear before she could reply. 'I'm about to die in this thing.'

'Na, na, na, darling,' Merijean said, entering the room in a raspberry dress, with faun steps, and tilting a perfume bottle upside down at the end of her finger. 'I'm just about' – she spun around in a half circle, searching the living room for her purse – 'ready.'

Bernie Kaye's composure wobbled and Ruth saw that he didn't even have the decency to keep his eyes off the thin of Merijean's dress in the rear – even if Merijean was trying to provoke him to look down there. And she *was* trying to provoke Bernie to look down there, down there where her skinny hips were, where the elastics on her panties made a dent in her raspberry dress when she walked. And she walked so it would. You'd think Bernie, or anyone, could see through a trick like that.

Ruth sighed and fanned her face. 'You've got too much of that stuff on. Really, Merijean.'

'Too much, old groutchie-pooh? It can never be too much. It's very heaven, isn't it? Don't you think it's heaven, Bernie? *Ter*ribly heaven?' Merijean slid a perfume-damp finger down Ruth's neck. 'There! 'S good for you. Good as vitamins. And now, *off* we go,' she said, pulling Bernie by the arm, faking tiny helpless high heel steps as if she walked that way all the time and had to press into him every now and then for support. The pity of it all was that Bernie had a mind, couldn't Merijean see that Bernie had a mind?

And then . . . giggling . . . floating up from the curb by Bernie's little blue MG . . . 'no, no,' Merijean's voice came faint, up from the street to Ruth's window on the second floor, 'Ruthie's a good kid, actually' . . . then something she couldn't hear . . . 'but quite fan*tas*tically drab' . . . the car door whacked shut, and then, from Merijean again, peppermint-candied, 'ooooh, Ber*nie*.'

Ruth hurried to the window, face frozen in the evening heat. The car had gone.

After a time, she lifted her hands from the window sill and lay down in the dark-hot, perfumed bedroom. Her eyes were open and she listen-

ed to every sound she could listen to and pushed every thought in her mind out of her mind. Over and over she refused to think of Bernie Kaye. There was no point in thinking about him. Besides, he was smart, he wasn't like the rest of the men Merijean got and dropped, and he'd soon enough see what Merijean was made of. Yet, maybe he liked falseness and frill. Maybe all men liked falseness and frill. Camouflage. Deception. Maybe . . . She got up in the dark and went to Merijean's dressing table and turned a small wall lamp on her face. Slowly, step by step she dabbed into Merijean's things: first some cold cream to reach down in the pores for the dirt – it said so on the label; then some foundation cream – over her cheeks, her chin, her nose; now the powder, but why would Merijean have *three* different kinds? . . . well; now a little pencil line around the edge of the eyes, and at the corners a faint little line out towards the temple; and so many lipsticks – so many! – but how really different was one from the other? Her hair. What about all of her hair? If she brushed it a bit upwards, and . . . there. She held a Japanese silk, Merijean's robe, up to her shoulders, but she had not done a good job of it; she needed practice at it; she had not done a good job of it: there was, in the mirror, a – a – 'You clown!' she hissed.

The still air began to move and began to cool, but she did not leave the dresser with its thousands of artifices, its false things.

It was late when she scrubbed her face in the unlit bathroom. It was late when she shut her eyes in the black bedroom; Merijean had been back for more than an hour, and she was asleep, snoring, with her red-tipped fingers dripping over the edge of the white sheet, when Ruth Schwartz shut her eyes in the black bedroom.

There was only one thing Ruth loved, really loved without reservation, and loved constantly. Pigeons. Undoubtedly it was a childhood thing, the adoration of pigeons, but she couldn't remember any significant incident, any delightful trauma with pigeons. At times it seemed that all the love she had in her would run out of her as she watched them. And all summer she watched them amidst sun-dried droppings, old people, young people, at lunch time on the steps facing Fifth Avenue at the New York Public Library. Hundreds and hundreds

of pigeons played games there and joyously took food from old ladies. On the stone cornices of the library they lodged, and they swooped down in winged clusters at the least provocation; this was their province. Passersby moved out of *their* way. There was a joy in their strut, an aggressive cockiness to their noonday conclave.

Ruth usually packed a fruit lunch, and sat on the steps to eat it. Some days she bought it, but on those days she tried to find the speediest lunch possible, for her office was several long Manhattan blocks away from the pigeons, on 42nd Street further west than the McGraw-Hill Company. She didn't want to spend *all* of her lunch time looking for a place to eat and then have to wait precious minutes to get served. There were days, in fact, she ran into Stern's for a swift counterlunch. Of two things she was certain, ever since she found her pigeons congregating around the library steps, unless it was raining to beat the band, her pigeons would be there, *and,* no matter how depressed she might be, they managed to lessen her gloom. It was something about their wobbly jauntiness, something about their perky independence. It certainly wasn't a belief they possessed any great beauty as far as birds go, but she had always loved pigeons and this summer, her first summer in New York, it seemed as though they were more important than ever. There had been times, on a Saturday or Sunday, when she sat in her apartment and wondered: are the pigeons out in front of the library steps? How are my pigeons this afternoon? Sometimes, especially this summer, when she came out of a movie, or up from a subway – or in any number of a dozen places – she'd think: are they out there at night? Do they sleep around there? It was painful to her sometimes that she could not *possess* them, but, too, she knew that was foolish pain; it was like being grieved over the inability to possess a landscape, or possess the sound of music.

Only one thing! – and it was a crime, a real crime. There was a disgusting bit of perversion right there in front of all of those exuberant pigeons. Scores of men hung around the steps to look under the dresses of women who sat on the steps. In broad daylight, right in front of God and everybody they'd stand in clusters, some thirty feet away, watching a woman's legs – and more – there on the warm afternoon steps. It was crazy, it was absurd. What could they possibly hope to accomplish? What vicarious energy drove them to such oafish sleuthing? They were

like ants: as each woman appeared and sat, with a newspaper or lunch, or just to take in the sun, the men, The Leg Watchers, would saunter slyly in the woman's direction and watch, hardly squinting their eyes in the sun, to see if they could see more than the woman's legs. And on a breezy day! Lord, you could see their nostrils dilate. The poor stupid women, though, with their impractical dresses and skinny legs, hadn't the least idea they were being x-rayed, panted over. In fact, their stupidity merely goaded The Leg Watchers on. It's a wonder the police didn't do something about it.

Every day, every week day, Ruth saw The Leg Watchers. Three or four of the same ones were there every time she came there and she despised them the most. Her jaw locked when she saw them. One thing, *she* always kept her legs clamped together, from the knees all the way down her calves. Not even a bit was she going to let them see, see anything. She turned to feed a pigeon. She had a pear core and she liked the feel of a pigeon's beak pecking in her palm.

As she dug into her bag for a tissue, the sun stung her big round knee. The noon sun put a pink glaze on her nylon at her knee and she looked at it, exposed; her calves were wet from pressing them together so. Digging in her bag, but with half an eye on – yes! they were watching! The Leg Watchers were watching, which went to prove that if she wanted to be loose like all those skinny, frilly things on the library steps she could attract attention, too. If she wanted to use guile, it was no problem, for God's sake, to draw attention. If she wanted to let the breeze push at the ends of her dress – upwards a bit – as it was doing, it was no problem to draw around her a group of dirty-minded men.

When she decided she didn't have a tissue in her bag, and stopped looking for it, she raised her head alertly, triumphantly, to stare at The Leg Watchers.

All she saw was teeth. One man slapped his thigh. Another punched his eye sockets with the flat of his hands, writhing his vile body. And as plain as day, Ruth saw one of the men mouth a derogation: 'man, that broad's a bona fide dog.' Then pigeons flew. Then her scalp stung. Somewhere a siren screamed, but Ruth thought the noise was the noise in her breast, so she held it, her heavy breast, walking down 42nd Street as noon crowds pushed her towards Eighth Avenue; blankets of cold

from open restaurant doors did not jar her, nor did the stale gales from greasy food shops nauseate her; her afternoon daze was broken only by a gentle jab in the rib. By a cup. A tin cup. Of a nun's. One of those grubby nuns.

'What do *you* want?' Ruth asked, trying to control the urge to grab her shoulders and shake her. *This* nun was old and wore a pince nez, and her shoes were flat, but she was false just the same.

'A few pennies for charity?' The Nun said, her pince nez gleaming in the 42nd Street sun.

'For what? For what did you say? You ought to be put in chains. You know that?'

The Nun began to move away, but Ruth's big thigh blocked her. 'Don't you have any shame? Standing on the street in that – in that get-up?'

The Nun's eyes shifted from left to right, from right to left, trying to see the street around Ruth's big figure. 'Please,' The Nun whispered.

'I'll do no such thing. You disgust me. What Order do you belong to is what I'd like to know if you're a nun. Tell me that. What Order do you belong to?'

The Nun covered her cup, with a wrinkled hand, and drew it to her black habit. 'There are begging Orders. There are.'

'All right then, what's yours? Tell me that. Can you tell me that?'

In a lower voice than before, The Nun said, 'The Blessed Sisters of Saint Heliotrope.'

'The Blessed *what?*' The laugh in Ruth's mouth hit The Nun in the face. 'You and your kind ought to be lashed. You know that? False, false, false, that's what you are. All the way through. And *look* at your filthy collar. It's been a week, if ever, if soap's seen that, I bet. I really ought to go to the police.'

Freckles of water popped out on The Nun's skin about her lips but her eyes, old and hooded by the pince nez, burned into Ruth's face for the first time. 'So you're not a woman cop?'

Ruth shook her head and folded her arms beneath the bosom under her white cotton blouse. 'But I think I ought to call one. This sort of thing is –'

The smile broke on The Nun's face, as though it had been the strike

of cymbals. 'Get the goddam hell out of my face, will you?' Her thin, pearl gray teeth hung in the sun, exposed to the hot of the street. 'Go crusade on some other corner, woman. I'm busy.' She side-stepped Ruth, rattling her cup, and assumed, without effort, a beatific aura for her customers.

In the phone booth at the corner, Ruth called her office and said she'd become ill, that she wouldn't be in for the afternoon. And she *was* a bit dizzy, unable to think except about derobing the false nun. She waited, there in the booth, pressing sweat from her neck, and trying to get The Nun out of her mind. She tried. Even as she followed The Nun, blocks, seven blocks to 35th Street, she tried to get The Nun out of her mind, but she kept following her, watching her walk pinch-stepped and pious, cup forward, black gown hanging still in the sun-numbed sunlight.

Several blocks west on 35th Street The Nun entered the black hollow of a red brick building near a warehouse. Ruth stood a block away, leaning on a mail box, with part of her blouse hanging out of her skirt, then she walked into the building. There was a strong smell of baby's vomit, and a man, a tiny man, with bad skin and beautiful eyes, stood near a door on the ground floor talking in Spanish to a woman.

'The Nun?' Ruth was very much taller than either of them. 'Which floor's The Nun's?'

The tiny man looked to the woman beside him, and then unleashed a rivet machine of Spanish. The woman responded with a series of shrugs, and they both stared at her with black eyes.

'The Nun,' Ruth said again. She raised her hands to her head and let them fall around her big shoulders, stooping to the linoleum to indicate The Nun's habit. Then, with her hands extended in front of her, she walked like The Nun, mimicking her pious step.

Pistol laughter shot from the Spanish couple, and simultaneously they said, 'ah, *La Monja, La Monja.*'

'Yes, The *Monja,*' Ruth said, exhausted.

'Up, up,' the woman pointed. '2C.'

The man nodded, his eyes blinking mirth. 'She live, *La Monja,* she live in 2C. Up. Up.'

The Nun was in her underskirt feeding a parakeet. Her hair was thin dry straw, parted neatly in the middle. She turned, her pince nez gone

– replaced with steel-framed hexagonal spectacles – and whispered, as though she dared not believe her old eyes, *'you?'*

'Yes, I'm here. I've come here. I followed you here.'

The Nun came forward, in low flat soft shoes, her underskirt sticking to her bottom and to the back of her legs.

Ruth watched the woman, looking for some wicked trick. 'You might try to throw me out, but I followed you. I followed you all the way from 42nd Street. You didn't get away from me. You thought you'd get away from me, didn't you?'

The Nun backed up and looked down at the floor.

'Didn't you? You thought you'd escape me, didn't you?'

'What do you want?' The sun's glare from a window without curtains erased the sight of her eyes through the hexagonal glasses. 'What do you want with me?'

'I've come to find out,' Ruth said, aware for the first time that her blouse was hanging out of her skirt. 'And you're going to tell me,' she said, tucking it in.

The Nun turned to a small sewing basket filled with cigarette butts and colored thread and took out the largest of the short, wrinkled cigarettes. 'Are you out of your head, girlie? You some sort of fanatic or something?'

Ruth stood in the middle of the floor. She dwarfed The Nun's junky furniture. 'I've come to find out,' she said, the sun burning into her shoulder and her arms in the furnished room.

'Why I beg?' The Nun asked.

'Why you beg in that false garb,' Ruth said, pointing to the lump of black cloth heaped on the woman's unmade bed.

'Why you want to know?' The Nun said.

'I came here to ask why. You tell me why. You could be punished, you know that?'

'Who by?' The Nun laughed and sat on the end of the bed, out of the sun, smoking. 'God?'

'The police!' Ruth told her.

'The cops? Neh. Listen, girlie, I've got some things to do. I've some things to do and I've got to go out. Why don't you go pick on somebody else, huh?'

Ruth would not move. Great sweat stains spread across her body but she would not move, move out of the sun. 'I've come here to find out why you do it and I intend to find out why you do it.'

The Nun started to smile, and changed her mind. 'I do it for money, girlie. M-o-n-e-y. Now, will you get off with you?'

Ruth loosened, moved nearer the bed, out of the sun. 'But surely you must be able to – to – aren't there welfare agencies that –'

'I get money!' The Nun said, standing, grabbing at the sides of her damp underskirt, grasping for dignity. 'I get a retirement pension, and I get fifty dollars every two weeks from my brother sometimes. My brother, he's a taxi driver and he makes good money and he sees to it that I wouldn't starve, which I don't.'

'But you beg. In *that*. In that thing, you beg.'

'Yes, and it's nobody's business if I do. I need a little more now and then, more than Carl can give me. And my pension, it's not always as much as I need. But so what?'

'So *what?* It's disgusting. It's sad and disgusting, you dressing up like a nun. Does your brother know about this?'

'No. He don't have to know.'

The sound of trucks and the silence of heat filled the room. Ruth was going to burst. 'But *why?* I mean, what do you need the extra money for?'

The Nun stiffened and looked frightened for the first time, and it made Ruth's neck throb as she picked up the scent again. 'Why? Tell me why. Tell me why and I'll go.'

The Nun shook her head.

'Why can't you tell me why?'

The Nun shook her head again and sat back down.

Ruth advanced, stood over The Nun, over the straw hair at the foot of the bed. 'Why? Tell me why!' Ruth wanted so to beat her, to hit her, and afraid that she would, she backed away once again into the sun. The Nun, half undressed, looked like an old child: her feet hardly touched the floor; her hexagonal glasses fell forward on her thin nose, as if she were a child playing Old Lady, and she was breathing hard, through her mouth.

'Why?' Ruth demanded.

'Get out of my room.'

'Why, you dirty old woman? You impostor. Why won't you tell me why?'

A cockroach ran across the sunny floor, and went into a neglected flower pot, and Ruth waited, but The Nun would not tell her why. The parakeet sang harshly without the sound of singing and The Nun sat, and would not tell her why. In the middle of the parakeet's song, Ruth made a dash for The Nun's habit and began picking at it, shaking it, pushing off The Nun, pulling at the strong seams, ripping it, shouting *why, why, why,* as The Nun beat her small fists in Ruth's fleshy back.

'Leave my clothes alone! Get out of my room and leave my things alone! Please leave my things alone!'

Even after Ruth staggered from the room, The Nun remained huddled over the shredded black heap on the sunny floor, her straw head crying into the black pieces, 'oh, please leave my things alone, please leave my things alone.'

Ruth scarcely heard her, though; she could hear only the sound of her tired voice – a voice as tired as her legs were tired going down the stairs – mumbling, 'What do you need the money for? Why can't you tell me what you need the money for?'

Although she sat in the sun, Ruth felt cold all over. It was 3:30, and she was sitting on the library steps, and it puzzled her: she could not remember getting there. In fact her head ached so she couldn't think very clearly about anything, but it did make her happy to think she had come, in spite of everything, to be soothed by the sight of her pigeons. And they swarmed about her, over her, back and forth, strutting, wobbling. They swarmed about her, and they were good to see, but her body was still with a chill in the middle of all the day's heat. An aspirin. She decided she needed an aspirin and walked slowly down the last group of steps, five steps, in front of the library, towards the drugstore. With three aspirins and a large soda she felt better, although the unrealistic cold of the drugstore confused her flesh as she came out on to the street. This time, clear-headed, she went to the library steps, determined to spend a half hour's rest before going home. As she walked up the five steps, between the smug, couchant lions, half-smiling

stone lions – who were always near the pigeons, guarding them – she saw . . . no, it would not be . . . it would be her imagination . . . it would be the heat . . . the straw yellow hair in the sun. Hexagonal glasses in the sun. There she was, The Nun, in the same low flat soft shoes, and with a cotton skirt of faded green and beige.

Ruth felt she could choke the woman. Right there on the steps. Before her tongue could move, could demand why she was there, The Nun turned, with a handful of pigeon feed high over her straw head, and screamed above the hum of traffic, 'Don't touch me, don't touch me, you crazy woman! You going to follow me all over town? Aren't you *ever* going to leave me alone?'

Ruth looked at the pigeon feed, the huge bag of it at The Nun's feet. 'You don't mean to say – you mean, you –'

'Yes, yes, you crusading little busy-body, so now you know. So now you know. Satisfied? It's my business what I do with my money and how I get it, isn't it? Isn't it? Shoo! Shoo!' The Nun kicked in the air towards Ruth, 'get away from here!', and with dozens of deep lines showing on her face, she threw a handful of feed at Ruth with such force that it stung through her blouse, bit into her hip. She buckled to her knees, there on the pavement of stone, there with her hands before her, all fours, facing the sun over the library roof. Up above her, etched on the library wall, she saw: MDCCXVC ★ THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY ★ MDCCCCII, and she saw pigeons, with pulsating feathered necks, tiny red eyes, crinkly feet, there on the stone cornices, twisting their necks, there as she was hunched on all fours; and as they took flight, wings spreading in nervous flight, thousands of them swooping down, down towards her in a winged blanket, blotting out the sun over the library roof, she saw their thousands of tiny red cold eyes in that black feather quilt, quivering winged quilt, and it was then that Ruth Schwartz opened her mouth, on her hands and knees, and croaked as a pigeon would croak, if pigeons croaked.

# The Star Blanket

by Shirley W. Schoonover

They had walked miles that day. They walked miles every day that they changed grazing land. The man and woman followed the sheep silently, the only conversation was that of the sheep as they flowed down the hills. The dogs were merely extensions of the man's will, moving to his short whistles, guiding the wooly mass down from the summer grazing lands to the winter flatlands. The man raised his right hand and the dogs fell to the ground, allowing the sheep to stop and graze.

The man threw his pack to the ground and sat next to it.

'Ought to be good grazing farther on down.' He pulled tobacco from his shirt pocket and bit off a corner.

The woman remained standing, looking up the side of the mountain they had descended and down the foothills.

'All the steps it took for us to get down here. All the steps it'll take for us to reach winter pasture. Who'd think there were that many steps to a mountain?' She shook her head and eased one booted foot against the other.

'You sure waste your time thinking about steps in mountains. If you want to get from one place to another it always takes steps.' He rolled the tobacco around his tongue, savoring the fresh flavor, the bite on his tongue.

'And when we go back up the mountain again, what a waste of steps. We don't even leave marks to remember from one spring to another. Or even spring to fall.'

'Don't worry about it, we don't need marks, we find the best grass, that's enough.' He stood up and whistled the dogs into action.

The rest of the day they spent following the sheep down the shallow hills, down to a valley that would hold them all the California winter.

As they went the man kept his eyes to the ground remarking the grass and the dryness. 'It's going to be a hard winter in the mountains.' From time to time he would spit brown juice onto the gray grass.

The woman walked behind him, carrying her pack, looking at the sky and the progress of the sun and clouds. She watched the man ahead of her, thinking, 'He never looks at the sky unless it's going to rain or snow. He doesn't notice the sheep-clouds or the feather-clouds, just the rain clouds.' She stumbled over a hummock of grass and the man turned and laughed at her.

'Get your nose out of the clouds, they won't save you any steps.'

'I was just watching the sky, and the clouds running down it.'

'No use watching the sky, it'll be there tonight and tomorrow. It's not good for anything except weather.'

'Sometimes I think a thing doesn't always have to be used to be good. The sky is good to look at.' She spoke softly to herself, not seeing the land around her; rather seeing into the land and the sky in dimensions she could not explain, but merely sense.

'What?' The man called back, then, watching her unseeing progress down the hillside, he turned, grinned, and walked on, head down.

That night they bedded the sheep down in an outcropping of gray boulders and sandy ledges. The dogs gathered the sheep like needles gathering beads, and scolded them into a bumping, blatting, wooly scuffle of bodies.

The man and woman sat beside their fire, drinking black sour coffee from tin cups. The man threw small shards of wood into the fire, and thought about the sheep and the dogs, and his need for another dog.

The woman lay on her back, half dozing, lying against the earth, feeling its outward thrust against her back.

'Do you suppose the mountains are growing?' She asked her husband.

'I don't suppose anything so crazy. These mountains have been here all my life, never grew an inch that I saw.' He squinted at her through the fire. His pale eyes took on a white cast from the flames; and as he looked, his face changed, becoming cunning and sensual. He arose and went to her. He lay beside her, taking her body with his hard hands, gripping her rather than caressing her. She lay passive, looking at him with mildly wondering eyes. When he was through he left her and rolled up in his blanket to sleep. She continued to stare up into the sky, past the stars.

She had come to him from her father in exchange for three pregnant ewes. She had been thirteen then, and a plain, quiet girl. Her father had been a sheep rancher who had fallen into difficulty, and with a large family of girls, it was expedient to bestow his middle daughter upon a

wandering sheep herder who promised to keep her. She had been a good wife to the shepherd, having a quiet gentleness with the lambing ewes, and a quickness of foot when needed to herd the sheep. She had lived these two years with him in the mountains and the flat lands; wearing levis and flannel shirts, cropping her hair once a year like the sheep, and had pleased him in the secret moments of their life together. He had taken her with him into the small town that was their outside world every spring during the shearing time, until a vagrant cowboy had noticed her feminine form under the heavy shirt.

'I'd sure like to take your daughter into the dance tonight.' His eyes had spoken more than the words, and understanding flashed between the men.

'My wife ain't free to go dancing. We're going back to the sheep tonight.'

'Sheep herder!' The cowboy narrowed his eyes at them. He mounted his horse and, looking tall and arrogant, he said, 'Maybe we could wash the smell off your woman, but right now it would be like bedding a lousy sheep.'

The man never took her into town again, instead he left her to tend the sheep when he made his trading trips. She was no more lonely during these trips than when he was with her.

The next day they reached their small cabin which was their winter shelter. It was adequate for shelter and no more. The man had built it ten years before, and owned the acres that surrounded it. They established themselves in it, the sheep in a large pen, the woman cooked supper in the iron stove. The man dozed while the woman folded blankets into the bed and pushed the table and chairs into a new design against the wall. She heated water and bathed herself, washing her hair and body over and over with yellow soap until she felt clean of the sheep dust and grit of the trail.

'You going into town tomorrow?' she asked.

'Yeah. I'm taking some of the lambs for selling. We need stock for the winter, so clear out the shelves for whatever I can pick up.' He turned noisily onto his side.

'Bring me something from town,' she spoke softly to his back; hands brushing through her hair, drying it, twisting it into a knot at the back of her neck.

'What like? I can't spend money on foolishness.'

'Just something little for me to look at. I saw a picture card when we were at the cowboys' camp. That was pretty. I could look at that and think of what other places there are.'

'You want that card? I'll bring you a new shirt and pants, they're pretty when they're new.'

'No, something for me to look at and hold. I don't want to use everything. Remember that fair we saw that first trip? They had cards and pretty boxes with shells. Bring me a pretty box with shells. I could look at it and touch the shells . . .'

'I'll see what there is to bring that doesn't cost too dear. Come to bed now so we can sleep.'

When he had gone into town with the lambs she shook out the blankets and swept the floor.

All the day long and night that he was gone she thought about the town and the rushing cattle in the stockyard, the lighted cafes, and the pretty goods in the store and the town women who wore colorful dresses.

'If he brings me the box I'll keep it on the table all winter. I can see the watermarks on the shells and think of all the miles they've come to be here.' She hummed to herself and tended the sheep.

When he came home she waited, breathless, while he unpacked the borrowed mule. He unloaded a package of wadded shirts and denim pants, wool socks, and a pair of boots for her. She watched him, and put away the sacked flour, coffee, sugar, tobacco, and tins of food. She dug through the sacks looking for the thing she had asked for.

'Did you bring me something pretty?' She hugged her arms to her chest.

'I spent all I could on things we need. I can't see what you needed that box for.' He unwrapped a dozen tins of snuff and stacked them on the table. 'Here's something you like, lump sugar for your coffee.' He handed her a box of sugar.

She took the sugar from him and put it on the shelf.

'No thanks, hey? Well, I can get my thanks in bed.' He touched her shirt front with a hard, accustomed hand.

'Look outside in the sheep pen. There's something else I got in town.'

She went slowly outside. In the gray mass of sheep stood a large, dark shape. It was a horse, standing solemnly in the half dark, looking toward her with mysterious black eyes. A fringe of forelock covered its eyes so that it seemed to look at her from a shadow. She entered the pen and pushed the sheep aside to walk to the horse. It stood unmoving when she touched its nose. She ran her hand up between its ears and stroked its neck. Its head drooped and it sighed. It neither welcomed her nor rejected her, but stood accepting her attention without resistance.

The man buffeted his way through the sheep and stood before her. 'I got him free from that cowboy we saw last spring. He was going to shoot the horse because it's windbroke and can't keep up with the cattle.'

The woman looked at them both. He put his arm possessively around the horse's neck. 'I can use him for packing our stuff up mountain next spring. One thing's sure, he won't be running away from us, he's too windbroken.'

'He's a pretty thing,' she said.

'Well, see, I brought you something to look at. He isn't much good for anything but looking at right now, but come spring he can be used.' He slapped the horse's shoulder and turned away. The horse looked at the woman and closed its eyes.

During the winter the dogs herded the sheep into nearby valleys for pasture. The horse grazed with the sheep, following them listlessly from spot to spot. The dogs nipped its heels and made it trot, causing it to breathe heavily in a wheezing, whuffling shortness of breath. The woman, seeing this, would call the dogs to stop; but they, listening to the man, would loll their tongues at her and dart at the horse until the man whistled them down.

At night, when the sheep were penned, the horse would stand at the fence looking off into the mountains. The man would sit beside the stove oiling his rifle, splicing tanned hides into a rope. The woman would sit on the floor staring into the grated opening of the stove, listening to the nightsounds. It was during one of these nights that she said: 'I think I'm starting a baby.'

'Well, that's good.' He stopped his work to touch her hair. 'When did this happen?'

'I think three months ago. I haven't had any woman signs for that long, and my belt's too tight.'

She stood while he felt her belly and sides.

'A baby, hey?' He thrust his hand within her shirt to her breasts. 'You are fattening up and filling out. Next time I go into town, I'll bring you some more sugar and some canned fruit. You feel all right?'

'Oh, yes. I think it'll be born in the summer. Could you bring me some cloth to make it some clothes?'

'Yeah, I guess I could. Flannel, I expect, and some pins and thread. You'll have to pack it with you when we go up mountain.' He held her to him and kissed her head. 'Give me a boy. He'd be a big help and we could keep more sheep.'

That night when they were in bed and he lay against her he repeated, 'Give me a boy. Give me a boy.'

When he slept she rose to one elbow and watched him. In sleep his face was the tender version of the day face, the pale eyes were hidden beneath a short run of lashes, the animal cunning mouth was relaxed into softer lines, tinted by tobacco juice and perpetual windburn. In sleep his face allowed no more knowledge of him than did his day face, it was so utterly expressionless. Whatever imagination or feeling he might have had was covered by the continuous need for material satisfaction. He had been orphaned at six years and had herded sheep for other men until he had begun his own flock. Since he had lost his parents, he had lost all identity except as a shepherd in the mountains. His dreams were of wool and sheep and the steadily increasing roll of money in a tin container under the floor. Some nights he panted like a dog in his sleep, dreaming of the heights and the slow unwinding of the pasture lands up into the emptiness of the sky.

He had first seen his wife while she was tending her father's sheep on a winter pasture; sitting in the scrubby grass bent over some knitting. She was thirteen, just budding from a youth into womanliness. Her small, round head bent so seriously over woman's work touched some memory of his dead mother; her brown boyish hands knitting steadily and her yet unformed, unmarred face struck him in the groin with a

kind of sad desire both to possess her and father her. In his late thirties, he had had few dealings with women, and so instead of courting her, he spoke with her father.

'She's a little bit strange,' said the father, 'She reads books and wanders off alone into the hills and we never know when she'll come back. But if you want her and figure you can put up with her ways, take her.'

The girl had stood silently watching from the doorway of her father's house. For the exchange of three sheep she was given to the man. Her mother had spoken to her, bidding: 'I never had time to tell you what to expect from a man. I can't tell you now except to be good to him. When he comes to you at night, take him.' The girl had looked at her mother with mute eyes. 'There's no way to find out about men and their ways except by doing. In ten years you'll not remember what it was like not to know a man. It seems to have been going on forever, and it will go on that way until he's too old.' The mother held her daughter for the last time. 'If you can take joy from his man's ways, that's good. If you can't, try to give him what you can, there's some joy in that too.' She kissed her daughter's round forehead. 'Now go to him, he seems to be kind, and you'd have to marry some one someday.'

The man had taken her away with him into the cabin he had built. He watched her arrange her small store of clothing on the high shelf. She walked about the room, touching the table and the chairs. She looked into the cupboard at the supplies, patted the dogs and touched the window ledge. Her presence in the room made it a less lonely place for the man and he smiled at her hands when they touched the dogs.

The room was a new and lonely place for the girl. The smells of the man and dogs, wet fur and wool, the low flickering fire in the stove, the absence of her mother made her aware of being pitched out into an alien world. The presence of the man, his physical urge toward her, made her feel shut in and apprehensive. She had some knowledge of what her mother had meant, but only enough to keep her nerves tense. She remembered the rams in mating season, their arrogant, almost cruel way of commanding the ewes; the ewes falling to their knees under the onslaught of the rams, the heavy odors of life regenerating itself. She tried to think if her father had ever looked at her mother that way, and the patience of her mother's eyes when night came.

'Come now, you've seen all the things I have.' The man took her arm and held her close against his chest, stroking her hair and back gently. He took her to the bed and watched her undress to the pale baby skin. She lay beneath the wool blanket, eyes closed.

'If I must learn man's ways, let it be now. Don't let it hurt. Don't let him hurt me.'

When the man touched her shoulder she flinched and opened her eyes. She stared at him and clasped her hands over her breasts, hiding them and herself from his maleness.

'Ah, now, I won't hurt you.' He said, 'Let me hold your hand and we'll talk a bit.'

She gave her hand to him and pulled the cover up to her chin.

'You're still afraid, hey? I won't hurt you.' He leaned over her and touched her face with his. 'You're so small, more like my child than my wife.' He touched her body under the blanket, gently, as if plucking a fragile plant. She turned her face to his shoulder and closed her eyes. He stroked her body carefully; she sensing the rushing of his passion; he building his desire slowly so as not to frighten her.

'Will you let me?' he asked her. She had fallen into a musing state. She nodded.

When he was through he turned her head and looked at her.

'Well, now, it didn't hurt, did it?' She looked at him with patient eyes and shook her head. He took her hand and rested with her until they both fell asleep.

During the years before she became pregnant her figure filled out into feminine contours. Her waist lengthened and diminished to a fitting slimness, her breasts lost the baby roundness and drooped slightly, her hips and buttocks rounded to firm, earth-round lines. Her walk changed from a girl's gait to a purposeful stride, although she still walked as if paying no attention to the earth, but walked slightly above it.

She and the man spoke little, they shared all their activities, but his mind rested on the sheep while hers mused over the eternally silent mountains and the dimension of sound and color.

In the spring of her pregnancy and after the lambing, they made their way back over the foothills and into the mountain pasturelands.

The woman had become fond of the horse; feeling that it and she

shared the same state of uselessness. The horse had recovered some of its broken wind and moved more alertly. Daily it was packed with their supplies and carried them silently after the sheep. The man walked ahead, whistling the dogs into the familiar patterns of action, watching the new grasses come up before them. The woman stepped behind him watching the rain mists climb higher up the mountain each day, seeing the horse move ahead of her, flicking its tail against the constant flies, reaching for the short grasses along the way. She drew pleasure from the horse's grace and its increasing strength and wildness. At night when the horse was unpacked, it would roll on the earth, rubbing its skin against the sharp strength of the mountain side, rising and kicking itself into the air. At these times she would clasp her hands and laugh while the horse nickered to her and coaxed her for the secret lumps of sugar she kept for it. The time came when she would ride the horse around the camp, calling the dogs to romp with her and the horse. She and the horse would pick their way from the camp to sudden ledges of the mountain and look down through the ground fog to the foothills, catching glimpses of occasional rivers and lights from other campfires. She would always return with the horse running and snorting, both looking wild and fresh from mysterious journeys in the night. The man would wait for her return and she would prepare the supper.

'What do you find in the night to look so happy about?'

'Oh, we look for the different stars. We saw camplights down east of us. We smelled the pines up mountain. It's all so different from the day. The stars are different up here from down land.'

'The stars are always the same. No matter where you are.' He drank his coffee and sat back. 'You're getting as strange now as you were when I first brought you home.'

'Strange? No, I'm not.' She looked at him anxiously.

'It's that horse. You ride him too much, and your're away from me too much. You need to settle down to thinking about regular things like the sheep and the camp. You're going to have a baby soon, you should think about that.'

'I do. Everytime he moves, I think about him. I made up a song to him.' She began humming to herself.

'Songs.' The man grunted, 'I mean the sewing of clothes, that thread and cloth cost too dear to be wasted.'

She looked at him and smiled. 'I have been sewing. But my mind keeps straying to the other things he'll need.'

'What else will he need? Plenty of flannel there.'

'Oh, I meant the sun to shine on him; the stars to sparkle at him at night. I hear little voices in the wind singing for him. I want him to have flowers to look at and pull apart.'

The man looked at her and shook his head. He settled into his blankets for the night.

The woman continued sewing straight white seams up and down squares of flannel. She threaded and re-threaded the needle, dreaming of her child.

That night while she was sewing she saw stars falling, running down the hill of the skies and disappearing behind the mountain. She wondered to herself, 'If the stars never change, why do some fall out of the sky?' She watched hard for some minutes to see if certain stars would lose their place and fall. But they didn't. Rather, as if from some place beyond the familiar stars, the falling stars appeared and then began their descent. The idea of familiar and new stars held her breathless, and she spoke to the child within her.

'Did you know that there are old stars and new ones? Or maybe the old ones are those that fall out of the sky, and we just see their ending.' She fell asleep and dreamed of the falling stars.

The next morning she was struck with the idea of making a blanket for the baby with stars on it. 'I remember when I was little, ma had a blanket with patches and designs on it. I want to make the same kind of blanket, but with stars on it.'

The man looked at her and jostled her arm. 'Stars on a blanket, hey? Well, if you've got any of that cloth left you could make it, I suppose. But what's the use of it?'

She smiled, 'There doesn't have to be a use for it except for me to look at. I look at the stars at night, and this way, I can carry the baby in them when he's born. And he can look at them when it's cloudy.'

They walked many strenuous miles that day and came to a camp of cowboys and cattle. They settled near it and walked to the campfire.

The cowboys greeted them with jokes and glances at her burdened figure. They sat around the campfire and shared supper and coffee.

'Yeah, this is as high as we'll take the cattle. You're welcome to the rest of this mountain,' the foreman said.

'We'll go up to the broken pass and summer graze there,' the man said, offering the cowboys his tobacco, and accepting a handrolled cigarette.

'Your wife going to have that baby soon?' the foreman asked.

'In about two months, she figures.'

'You'd better send her down the mountain then. She'll need help with it.' The foreman was father to seven children, and knew of the difficulties of childbirth.

'Oh, could I go down to a ranch?' she asked.

'You figure she'll need help? I'll be with her when the baby comes.' Her husband exhaled cigarette smoke and glanced at his wife.

'Bringing babies is woman's work. You never know what might happen. Bring her down to our ranch, we have an old woman there who brings lots of babies.'

'Well, I guess I can spare her for a couple of weeks.' He took his wife's hand and held it on his knee.

'Why don't you let her stay at the ranch until you come back down mountain? She can pay her way by helping the cook. And she'll need the rest. You don't want her bringing the baby back up mountain.'

'Oh, I'd like that.' The woman sat back thinking about the society of other women, the talk she missed, and the help she'd have when the baby came. 'I could make the star blanket then, if somebody would help me.'

'Star blanket?' The foreman looked at her and then at her husband.

'Yeah. She got a notion the other night she wants to make a blanket for the baby with stars on it. No use in it, though.'

'What kind of blanket is that, Missus?' The foreman spoke kindly.

'I thought I'd make a white blanket with blue stars on it. The baby could look at them when it's cloudy, and it could know what stars are right off.'

'I have an old blanket like that.' He stood and went to his pack, Pulling out a small saddle blanket of some Indian design. He held it out to her. 'You can have it if you want.'

She took it in her hands and smiled at him. The blanket was white bordered with bands of black and blue and with blue stars and lightning shapes. It was heavy, coarsely woven wool. 'That's pretty. I take it with many thanks.' She smiled again at him and stroked the stars.

'You don't have to give my wife anything like that.' Her husband frowned in gratitude.

'No, no, take it. You can keep it for the baby, and it will be warm for him in the winter.'

The foreman turned to the husband, 'I mean what I say about sending her down mountain when her time comes. You've got that horse, it'll carry her down in a couple of days.'

'I'll have to think about it.'

'Mister, don't take this unkindly. I've watched the two of you go up and down the mountain these years, and I know you're tight with a dollar. But don't be tight with your wife or your baby. You can't ever get them back when they're dead. So just risk the sheep for that last month and send her down to the ranch.' He turned to the woman. 'When you feel your time coming, ma'am, you just start down the mountain. If you need help down, I'll be glad to ride down with you.'

'Thank you. I'll try to come down without help.' She touched her stomach and sighed. 'But how will I know when it's time?'

'My wife says when the baby moves down so you can breathe again, that's the time to get ready. So you just get on that horse and start down.'

That night the cowboys talked and told stories about their lives with the cattle. The man and woman watched and listened. As it is with all lonely men they sang the melancholy songs and played handmade guitars. The woman saw them as beautiful and kindly strangers who shared her loneliness on the mountain. She saw the glint of their saddle decorations in the night light and watched their dark figures slump in the darkening, starfilled night. They spoke of towns she had never seen, one spoke of the ocean and its strangeness. He showed her some shells he had brought from the ocean shore. She held them and touched the water etched designs. The cowboy had linked the shells together on a hand braided cord. The shells tinkled together and shone blue and white under the stars.

'See, ma'am, the inside is shiny and smooth. The outside is rougher and dull.' He turned the shells over and over. 'Folks say that they've found shells like this up here in the mountains.'

'What? Shells in the mountains?' She looked at him for the joke.

'Ma'am, I'm not fooling you. When I was down on the coast last year, I ran into a fellow who told me so. He said if we keep our eyes open in the raw parts of the mountain, sometime we might spot marks of shells and plants that live under the water. I've been looking ever since then. But I haven't seen any.' He poured the last of the coffee into her cup. 'If you get up higher you might just keep your eyes open. You might find some. This fellow told me these mountains are still young. And that they've hardly finished growing.'

'I never heard of such a thing.' She looked at him sharply to see if he was making fun of her.

'The way he tells it, the mountains grew up out of ocean water, pushing and shoving each other, and carrying the shells and plants with them.' He looked at her earnestly.

'I've heard some tall stories in my day, but this takes them all.' Her husband rolled into his blankets and eyed the cowboy. 'Don't fill her head up with any stranger ideas than she already has.'

'Tell me the rest. How young are these mountains?' She leaned forward to hear every word.

'Ma'am, they're way older than we are. They've been here before white men or Indians ever came, but this fellow said that they are babies compared to mountains in other parts of the world.

She looked away from him to the mountain looming over them. 'Could we tell if they were still growing?'

'I figure if this mountain ever starts to grow again, we can forget about getting off. I don't think a mountain's growing pains would be easy to take. This man said that when mountains grow they grow from the inside out, and parts break off.' He smiled at her and said, 'He didn't think they'd be growing any more for years, so don't you worry about it, ma'am.'

'Thank you for telling me about it. My husband thinks I'm strange for thinking such things.' She looked apprehensively at her sleeping husband.

'No, ma'am, you're not strange. There's a lot to be known about this world, and the only way I figure you can find out anything is to wonder about it and ask somebody. I've got some books back at the ranch, you're welcome to read them and look at the pictures.'

'Thank you, I look forward to reading them. How did you get them?'

'Every winter when we're in slow times I go out to the towns and look around. There's ways to find books and ways to learn things. All you have to do is go out and hunt for them.'

'Why do you look for books?'

'Ma'am, I guess I'm just part cat. When I see something I've got to know all I can about it. That star blanket you wanted. I think you're smart to give it to your baby. He'll grow up looking at the stars and maybe be a better or smarter man than his dad. I don't mean disrespect toward your husband, but every little shove we can give to another person, means they'll go a lot farther than we did.'

He stood up and moved away from her. 'I'd better let you get some sleep now. You listen to Jake and go down mountain when your time comes. And you read all the books you want. When winter comes, if you want, I'll bring you some more.'

She lay rolled up in her blankets looking into the darkness where the cowboy had disappeared. Her mind hummed and murmured with the things he had told her. And he hadn't thought her strange for her thought and questions. She hugged the star blanket to her and fell into a deep sleep.

The sounds of men moving and the barking of dogs woke her. She lay for minutes watching the men in the dawnlight squatting over their coffee cups and tin plates. When her husband leaned over her, she smiled and struggled to her feet. They shared breakfast with the cowboys and left the camp. They had walked a mile when they heard a horse coming behind. They stopped and saw the cowboy riding up the slope. When he reached them, he stopped his horse and handed the woman the string of shells.

'I thought you might like these for that baby, ma'am. I'll be going down to the ocean again in a couple of years, and I'll get more.' He saluted her with his hat and turned his horse.

'Thank you! Thank you!' she called after him.

'Well, he's a strange one. You forget all that fooling with shells and books.' Her husband turned up the mountain and whistled at the dogs. She followed him, holding the string of shells and wondering at the cowboy's goodness.

That summer as they followed the sheep higher into the mountain she looked for marks in the raw sections of the ledges. She wandered from the sheep trail onto ledges and shelves, scratching into the sliding shale for the shell marks. But she found none.

She gazed into the side of the mountain as if willing it to disclose its hidden shells. As her size and awkwardness increased she was forced to ride the horse for the major part of the day, or stay in camp while her husband took the sheep to new grazing. When she was lefs alone she sewed more garments for the child or took slow walks with the horse, talking to it about the cowboy and what he had said to her. The horse had become doglike in its devotion to her and followed her, nuzzling her pockets for the sugar. She sat long hours on the mountain side, making bouquets of the spring flowers, garlanding the horse's mane with them, and laughing when he ate them indiscriminately.

The man changed with the summer, growing more irritable. He would watch her while she turned the shells over in her hands, or take out the star blanket and count the stars on it. He watched her find things on the mountain and rejoice over them, things that he had seen, unseeing, for years. What new dimensions she found and lived in were not of his liking, and he grew to dislike and then hate the mountain and her preoccupation with it.

'Next spring,' he said, 'we're going up another mountain. This one's been over grazed, and it's too crowded.'

She glanced at him and then up at the ledged peak.

'We'll find new places on the next mountain. Maybe it will have shells like the cowboy said.

'You're wasting time looking for shells on a mountain. That kind of talk is for kids and old folks, we're looking for grazing land.' He frowned at her and held her arm tightly. 'You forget that kind of talk. And forget that cowboy.'

'I won't. You always think I'm strange. But I'm not. I can wonder about anything I want to.' She pulled away from him.

'You're thinking about that cowboy. I heard you talking to him, and looking at him.' He raged at her, suddenly jealous, suddenly aware that she was more than a convenience.

He took her by the shoulders and shook her. She glared at him and ground her teeth. He released her and went to the fire. They had supper and lay down to sleep. After a few minutes he went to her and took her body fiercely to his. She lay passive, looking at him with a fresh awareness of his body. She felt the coarse hairs of his body and the perspiration running down his face. At once she remembered his kindness to her on that first night. What had made him change over the years? She felt the thrusting of his body and a quick discomfort about the child. She tried to push him away, saying, 'Stop. The baby. You're hurting me.'

He continued to thrust against her, determined to reclaim her from the mountain, to bring her back to the docile wife she had been. Through the haze of desire and his own loneliness he finally heard her words and their meaning. He stopped, resting heavily against her, looking into her eyes. She resisted him now not only with her body, but with her will. He turned away from her body and lay beside her. They lay side by side on the mountain slope. He gazing at her with a lonely despair; she lying silent, no longer resisting him, but mute and aloof, part of the mountain, removed utterly from his grasp, eyes turned inward to the remote workings of her own mind and body.

She lay resting softly against the mountain, listening somehow to the silent workings of the child within her, feeling the kicking and stretching of the unborn, sensing a rebellious anger in its movements. She touched her stomach, marvelling at the fruitful fullness that jutted imperiously against the black night sky.

'Mountains grow from the inside out.' It was that way with her. The vigorous, active wonder within her was pushing her body out of shape to accomodate its own demands, lying heavily against her spine. She stretched a hand out against the peaceful tilting mountain slope, feeling the roundness of it, imagining the massed bones and structure beneath. She nestled against the curve of the mountain and slept.

The next day they reached the summer grazing land. The mountain here was open for miles to flats of grassland and small ponds filled with ice water from underground springs. The sheep would graze for weeks

before exhausting the ground cover. The man and woman set up a tent against a windfall of trees, gathered the broken, sun-dried wood into stacks for their small summer fire, and prepared for the weeks of wandering after the sheep during the day and returning at night to the same spot.

The woman continued her search for shells, although aware that none would be found in the grass-grown flats. She walked with the sheep and the horse, disappearing into the alleys that led up and into the mountain. From time to time she saw deer and rabbits staring out from the mountain's secret avenues, heard birds calling above her and felt the silence of the mountain. She walked daily higher through the trees and ledges, following dead stream beds into echoing chambers of the mountain's interior. As she picked her way deeper into the mountain she lost track of what she was looking for; listening to the stillness of the mountain and the creak of trees. She followed the mysterious silent voice of the mountain as it led her farther from her husband and his sheep to some invisible, lost, unspeaking essence that beckoned her and charmed her senses with a provocative, almost sensual desire. When night fell on the mountain she would drift down through the ground mists to the camp, lost in the wanderings of her mind, to prepare supper.

Her nights were filled with the campfire, her husband and his talk of the sheep, the alienduties of cooking and eating. She cooked and ate in silence, looking at the pots and plates, trying to recognize some familiar quality about them. Her husband's face, once so involved with herself as to be her own identity, now was foreign and harsh.

He would look at her over his plate, wondering at her silence. He spoke to her and received no answer.

'I shot a deer today,' he'd say. 'We'll have meat every day now and dry the rest.' He'd pause and wait for her reply. None came.

'How's your sewing? You finish all that flannel?' He stoked his mouth with tobacco and closed the tin.

'Hey! Answer me!' He threw a stick at her.

She turned her head in his direction, inquiringly.

'Talk to me!' He threw another stick at her.

'Yes.' She smiled in his direction, her eyes looking through him into the dark beyond.

'You are queerer now than you used to be.' He rolled the tobacco in his mouth. 'Is it the baby?'

'The baby is fine. We walked into the mountain today. There's something up there.' She took out the star blanket and unrolled it over her knees.

'What's up there? I suppose there's deer and a few bear. You be careful when you go alone.' He peered at her, watching her hands stroking the stars on the blanket.

'No, there's something up there that I can't find. I can almost hear it. Sometimes when I come around the corner of a ravine I think it will be standing there. But it never is.'

'You take a dog with you tomorrow. And take the rifle.'

'No. The dogs might frighten it away. And I don't want to shoot it. I want to find it and see what it is.'

Her husband stood up, throwing the remaining coffee into the fire. 'Well, you better stay close to camp. Your time is almost here and you don't figure that thing in the mountain is going to help you any, do you?'

'No, I just want to find it.' She opened her blankets for the night. 'I feel like the baby is moving down. When can I start for the ranch?'

'I don't figure on letting you go. You talk so strange they might not let you come back.' He lay next to her, holding her head in his hands. 'You going crazy on me?'

She shook her head. 'No, can't you tell there's something waiting in the mountain?'

'There isn't anything in that mountain but deer and bear.' He pulled her down to his chest. 'Now you just forget that crazy talk and think about how you're going to have that baby here in camp.'

'You promised I could go to the ranch and have a woman help me.'

She huddled beside him, her distended abdomen pushing him away from her as his arms tightened about her.

'No, I've been thinking. You go down mountain to that ranch and read those books about shells and growing mountains and you'll get so crazy you won't come back.'

'I will come back. Oh, let me go down. I'm afraid of being alone when the baby comes.'

'What help you need, I'll give you. If I can bring sheep, I can bring a baby.' He looked at her cunningly, 'If you stay here you can hunt for that thing.'

She looked levelly at him. 'You are breaking your promise.'

'Promises are for people who can use them. This promise is better used broken. I'll take care of you and the boy when he comes.'

Her eyes flickered and she looked away toward the horse.

'I'll be taking the horse with me everyday from now on, so you won't be trying to sneak out on him.' He spoke with his eyes closed.

'I don't like you for this,' she said. 'If the baby is hurt by your keeping me here, it's all your blame.'

'No blame will be coming. I'll take care of that.' He slept leaning against her, holding her body as if to keep her with him even in sleep.

During the rest of her time, the woman walked restlessly through the mountain's interiors. She spoke to the mountain and the thing that haunted her. 'Let me have the baby easily and quickly, don't let the baby be hurt.' The listening air around her echoed upon the mountain walls, 'Hurt.'

Early in the morning her labor began. She went into the tent and lay on the blankets. Her husband watched her face and said, 'I'll just take the sheep out to the grazing and come right back.' She nodded and he left.

When he didn't return when she expected him, she crept out of the tent to watch for him. She lay on her side against the yielding slope, resting between pains, holding the star blanket to her, twisting it between her hands when the pains reached their peak, relaxing when the pains subsided.

She watched the sun climb the hill of the sky and descend. At times it seemed as if she must fall off the shoulder of the earth and down into the sky. Moments went by that she clung to the side of the mountain, feeling a pulsebeat under her, hearing a beating in the air as if the mountain were heaving with her and falling out from under her. She was sweating heavily, her body sliding within her clothes, her hands were slippery in the grass and on the blanket. The pains increased in rapidity and strength until she was constantly knotted with them, breathing harshly through her mouth. She was swept from the side of the moun-

tain at one second, and pushed back into it at the next. Then, suddenly, the child was forced from her body into the air, and the mountain stopped twisting beneath her. She lay spent, watching the mountain fall back into place above her. Then she sat up and reached for the child. Its face turned up to hers, utterly lifeless. The cord between the child and the afterbirth had strangled it, choking off its first cry. She looked down at it dumbly, hearing a forlorn wail from beyond her ken. She held the dead child to her, rocking it. She twisted the cord from its neck, and covered the child and all in the star blanket.

When the man returned he found her sitting on the slope, holding the dead child wrapped in its bloodied star blanket.

'I lost my way in those ravines. How's the boy?'

'He's dead. He choked on the cord.' She smoothed the blanket over the child.

'Let me see. Huh. He never got his breath.' The man turned the child about in the blanket, touching the round, puckered face, the blunt features, the scruff of hair.

'Well, you rest. I'll bury him in the trees.' He walked away with the child.

'No, don't bury him up here. Let me take him down so he can have a mark on his grave.' She went after the man, reaching for the child.

'No need in that. He died here and he can stay here.' He laid the baby under a tree and dug a shallow grave. She stood, leaning against the tree, eyes averted. He buried the child and covered the small enclosure with branches and stones. 'This tree can be his mark. He never needed more than that.'

The woman sat beside the grave and dropped leaves gently on it, seeming to hear a heartbeat from the buried child. She laid her head down on the branches and closed her eyes. 'I'll stay here with him until morning. He might be lonely and afraid all alone.'

The man nodded and walked to the camp.

That night, lying next to her child's grave she listened to the sounds of the mountain and dreamed about the child.

In the morning the man prepared to take the sheep away to the grazing. The woman went to the fire and cleaned herself. When the man spoke to her she said: 'You take the sheep today. I want the horse.'

The man looked at her. She found her string of shells and put them into a pocket. 'I'm going down mountain.'

'What for, you don't need help any more.'

'I'm going down mountain,' she said stubbornly, 'I let you strangle my baby with your ideas of keeping and using.'

'I didn't strangle the baby.' He stepped toward her, hands out.

'No, not likely, but it's the same.' She called the horse and turned down the mountain.

'You figure you're going to find some shells?' He called at her, running after the horse. 'You won't find any. Ever. There's no use looking!'

'I want to look. I want to see what it's like to look.'

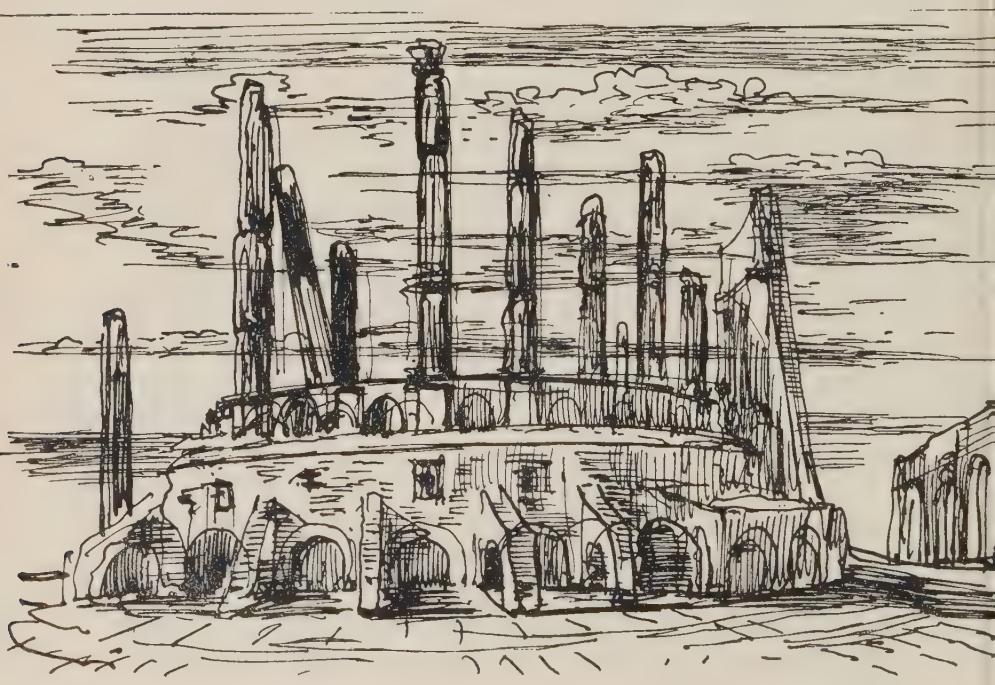
'You'll be back. You'll see. There's no use in it at all!'

'No, no use at all.' She looked at him for the last time and rode down the mountain.

# Drawings by Eugene Berman

Note by Eugene Walter

EUGENE BERMAN was born in Russia just before the century began, lived long in Paris and New York, now spends much time in Rome. As a youth he studied architecture; Italy was his first, and is his lasting, love. His rapport is with the baroque, yet in all his work he has evoked, effortlessly, the changing stylistic atmosphere of the half-century: from the metaphysical (de Chirico's 'nostalgia of the infinite') through the neo-romantic and surrealist to a kind of new classicism appropriate to the new love of ruins. His painting has been overshadowed by his accomplishments in the theatre. He designed the original *Opéra de quat' sous* in Paris in 1937, the Balanchine-Stravinsky *Danses concertantes* in 1944, the dazzling *Don Giovanni* at the Metropolitan, among a score of productions. His sketchbooks rank with the greatest of his achievements: the unpublished drawings seen here come from the 50's, are all of Italy. E.W.



E.B.
19 53

# Big Doings | by Peter Viereck



I *(voice of will and technics)*

Big doings! Engines
Still higher. Up there
Stars (golden and flying)
Challenge. Again, again
Up reaches will, male, steel.
  Paper-flimsy below
  Is grove-child's sinless aim:
  Trifle of squandered graces,
  Confetti of false starts,
  Ashcan of reveries.
O Bentham, builder of cities,
Has Eros bridged space, has
Play honed precision tools?
Unlaunchable was trance. Then
Launch engines. Doings

II *(voice of trance and play)*

One day men will get up before the sunrise,
Night-air still eerie with Aldébaran,
And gravely wear the pointed cardboard hats
(Spangled with cookie-shapes from astro-textbooks)
That dwarfs and jugglers caper in at fairs
To make the yokels gape at lore of stars.
And each hat pointing toward Aldébaran.
I say there are strong winds between the atoms,
Strong lonelinesses all around each textbook,
And these, that day, will blow your hats toward ashcans,
Will waft or dip them as the atoms frisk,
Pleading, 'Aim nearer, nearer, tenderer;
Find more in less, the highest in the inmost.'
  You'll rally back, O fatuous Man Invictus;
  How masterful you'll snag the winds of space

Right through their manes and braid them into networks
And engineer far lonesomeness away
And knead cowed space into your cookie-dough.
Then how they'll soar, the pointing hats will soar,
Your hero-hats will stab Aldébaran.
Then burn your corpses or the pigs will eat them,
Because the graves that day shrug tombstones off
And gape astounded at Aldébaran.
But I (because the much is in the little
And cosmos hangs upon a feather's fate)
Will twist my hat into a paper airplane
And aim it nearer than Aldébaran
And skim it round a yellow butterfly.

# The Gypsy Girl

by Richard Romain

It was in the bustling swarm of the market place, standing alone on the opposite sidewalk, that he first saw the gypsy girl. For five patient detached minutes he watched nothing else. Her short and rounded fingers clutched bunches of slim white-rooted scallions which she pushed into the chests of the people who passed by. Her front teeth were very large, and her puffy cheeks overbalanced the rest of her face. Now and then she put both hands to her head squeezing her temple between her thumb and middlefinger as though she wanted to stop a pain. Each time she rubbed her head she peeped toward the haggard gypsy woman who hawked with a basket slung under each short arm. The woman ignored her completely.

The girl was even smaller than the woman, looked seventeen or eighteen, and might have been pudgy but for the very high, almost acrobatic, heels she wore. He watched her swaying with her fingers wrapped around the green-topped bunches, replenishing her handfuls from the woman's basket, and darting in and out of the circular dome of the enclosed part of the market. Her scallions were always outstretched toward the women who cruised along the narrow rows between the stands, and who seemed wholly oblivious of her.

Ancient black-shawled women glanced at him mistrustfully as he peered into the swarm from the seclusion of the farther sidewalk. He still wore the tunic part of his uniform with the rigid, high, almost clerical collar, its whiteness against the dull blue of the smooth wool, exaggerating even more the size of his lumpily triangular adam's apple.

Though he was often in the open air he was so pale that even the grave narrow-chested women who traveled with him in the same wandering prophetic army tried to joke about it. He didn't know what he should do about the girl. He had always been taught to wait, but he knew he would feel uneasy. She might be gone, and besides he had not seen her before, even though his group had been there four days giving sermons and singing hymns on the sidewalks near the central square. The piercing longing for the short darkness of her that suddenly gouged him threw his body in motion across the cobbled street toward the rows of stands which circled the market.

'What am I going to say?' he thought midway in the street, 'I could

start by talking to her about those sprouts she sells, but I could be direct also.'

She wondered why the tall one who had been gawking at her reddened as he walked in her direction. A woman in a bulky coat shouldered past her and she turned around to pursue the woman. The woman ignored her even though the girl tugged at her sleeve; she returned to where he waited for her.

'Those stalks, how much are they?' he said from deep in his throat.

'The small bunches are four cents and the large ones are a nickel – three for a dime . . . Aren't you one of those who sing in the streets with the red and blue outfits?'

'Yes,' and because he could think of nothing else to say he stood there silently. Watching the rings of people around them every day on the sidewalk had sharpened his awareness. He noticed that two teeth were turning softly grey, and that her breasts were fuller than he had expected for a girl so small among the lean gypsies. Conscious of his lanky stiffness he expected uneasily that the eyes of the women who passed stared curiously; glancing around quickly he saw that the women threading their way around the stands paid no attention to him. Even the older gypsy woman was out of sight.

He held the raggedy bunch for which he had put a nickel into her soft creased hand.

'I didn't really stop just to buy these.' He found himself glancing around again seeing if anyone watched, and at the same time snatching sight of her rounded grownup legs protruding from the high stiff heels.

'I can't explain too well. I'd like to see you sometime, soon, before either of us go away from here. I found myself looking . . . but never mind, would you like to?'

'But I have to be here all day.'

'I mean at night,' he said.

'Oh.'

'Can you?' He felt very tall and bony next to her.

'Here she comes,' the girl said quickly, 'my mother. Here tonight nine o'clock,' and she darted off into the crowd leaving him bewildered until he saw the older gypsy woman, a basket slung on each arm, easing her way through the people.

'Some good stalks of celery, sir?' she asked him.

'No thank you.' He spoke so slowly and politely that several people who were near him smiled.

He made his way back to the sidewalk, his narrow shoulders in the blue tunic sliding easily through the women and occasional men milling around the circular market place. He looked toward the wooden stalls and chipped scales hung on rusty chains, the counters lined with lettuce, neatly folded chickens, huge prunes, and hard bright tiny oranges, but he did not see the girl again. Since it was almost noon he followed the narrow street, pressed in by buildings that sprung upwards abruptly vertical, until he reached the wide and uncluttered square with the stiff grass and the solitary palm tree.

He was surprised that he wasn't quivering with guilt. Since long ago, far before he could remember, he had been traveling with the group clanging the warnings of the Holy Book into listless streets. His mother had belonged and sometimes he had trembled just seeing her wrinkles and paleness in the uniform of blue with the cap pulled down almost to her ears. There had only been the two of them so he had traveled with her. Lately there had been an uneasiness about him, a restlessness. He had tried to shove it away from him because it scratched at him with a feeling of futility when they were in their familiar semi-circle on the sidewalk. The faces of the curious ring of people who paused to hear began to interest him more. He watched the grave and lighthearted ones while the itchy sensation of missing something hovered around him. Today it caught him. His unreasoning feeling for the girl was strange to him. He had been with women briefly twice before. Each time had been a complete surprise to him, uneventful, and afterwards he had returned automatically to his accordion and the habitual inquisitive ring of sidewalk spectators. Neither time had excited him very much, and his own long nervous unhardened body had been barely equal to the task. Now the thought of the fluttering darting gypsy girl, her rounded legs propped up on towering clacking heels, filled his mind. He let her almost puffy face slide out of his mind when, across the boulevard, he saw the group's blue flag on the smooth pole he had carried so often. They waved to him as he crossed the street toward them, and he waved back, wondering if the girl would really be there

tonight to meet him. He had forgotten the stalks he still carried like a thin green whip and they laughed together at the familiar awkward lean figure as he crushed the scallions into a springy green ball deep in his pocket.

He played his small accordion and sung with them in his soft voice for the day's last meeting. It was near a busy corner and far enough from a a large cafe not to irritate the owner. At half past eight he went to meet the girl.

The market was closed and dark; the stands had either vanished or were empty. He decided that he was a realist, regardless of what others thought of the uniformed phantoms who harangued on the sidewalks, and so he thought about what he would do if the girl didn't come. It was possible, since she had at least gotten rid of some of the scraggly stalks that she had to sell in the market place. A church with a dim muffled bell struck nine and he was still alone in the quiet shadows. He thought about the years he had spent wandering this whole countryside, the small cities and big villages; turning round to come back to them again and seeing new cracks in the grey sidewalks. He smiled always when he played his accordion, because he felt afraid, lost and alone. The warmth inside him today at the thought of the short gypsy girl had driven some of that away. Now it was returning stronger than ever, and he saw himself surrounded by the same curious people and murmuring children in the hot cauldron of summer and the cold winds of January and February, and his face started to line and droop.

The bell tolled abruptly, but fuzzily, at quarter past, and she came. She had sat on the hard wooden top of a barrel after supper and wondered if she should go to sleep or go to meet the tall thin man with the gigantic lump in his throat. Her head had stopped hurting when she ate; she wiped the grease from her mouth with the bottom of her skirt and looked up into the clear black dotted sky. The wind was from the South and warm and she tried to decide if she liked men. She had to sell the green stalks and take her turn twice a week to do the pots and plates of supper – this she had to do or get beaten, but she didn't have to do anything with men unless it gave her pleasure. She had pleasure once, with a butcher from the market; the other times it was only a curious noisy excitement she forgot quickly. Leaving the stiff clicking

shoes on a low barrel she glided across the grass, her whole body feeling light and her feet sensing the touch of the ground as the blades of grass flattened under her toes. The air felt tender and warm against her face; she decided to go if she could get a ride on one of the trucks going in for the evening.

She saw his thin drooped outline against the blue blackness.

Smiling up at him in the dark, she said, 'The gypsy's here.' She was jelly-like as he pushed her against the wood of one of the heavy empty stands, kissing her mouth very hard.

'I am very soft and I bruise,' she giggled. But one of her lips trickled with the thin warm taste of blood.

'I'm stupid,' he said releasing her quickly, 'forgive me'. She smiled again and touched his bony hand.

'Where shall we go?'

He wasn't sure how to answer. There were two cinemas, she might mean those. But he wanted to take her to his austere almost empty room along the narrow corridor of the hotel. He was silent, then he remembered the shape of her grownup legs in the high heels and the way her lips had been soft when he pushed her against the stand.

'To where I stay,' he said hesitantly, aware of the emptiness of the market and the night.

'Well . . . if you want.'

They held hands as he picked the long way back along the brightest streets. He was sorry that not everyone who passed noticed that he was no longer alone. For once he could look at the couples walking or riding by without a feeling of desolation and tiredness; he remembered how he used to look the other way to keep from staring. When he saw the hotel at the end of the street they walked faster. Although he wondered now if the clerk would say anything about the girl, or even mention it to the others in the morning, he was too impatient to sneak in carefully. As soon as he opened the torn screen door he realized his luck, the clerk wasn't there.

He led her up to the stairs to the third floor whispering, 'Hurry up this way.'

The girl drew back momentarily. 'Have you a wife or something you're hiding from here?'

'Oh no, ssh, it's my group.' He pointed to his uniform. 'They sleep here too.'

Finally he reached his door, pushed it open while he stood back and felt her soft body slip by him into the room.

'Oh,' he said, 'I guess I should tell you – I should have told you already – my name is Edward.' He closed the door very softly.

She stayed until the morning and left him happily eating the breakfast he had made while she made little grunting noises waking up. She had insisted on returning to her mother's truck by herself. It had given him time to think how content he had been to have her placid soft body close during the night. He knew that the gypsy girl would stay in his mind even when he played his accordion today.

When he looked closely that morning at the faces of the curious circle of people who stopped to listen to them, they looked strangely warmer and less mocking than they had the morning before.

He was certain that without the girl's stubby creased hands and puffy cheeks his future would be to dwindle and wrinkle beneath the warm blue tunic.

'Edward, are you ever going to get yourself out in front to give one of the addresses, or are we going to have to keep doing that for you?' his group leader asked laughingly. They had been making his speeches for him for eight years.

'Tomorrow I will.'

'Really?'

'Really, really. Even today I wanted to talk.'

'Why didn't you tell me, I would have let you do it today.'

'No, that's all right,' Edward said, 'I didn't want to bother you. Tomorrow will be fine. After all I have waited a long time already.'

At four o'clock between meetings he hurried down to the market to see her. He stood on the high sidewalk peering into the moving mass of people for almost five minutes. Finally he saw the girl. She wore the same clothes that she had worn last night, and had stalks of scallions in one hand while she tried to use the other to stop people and show them the slender bunches. He didn't see the old gypsy woman anywhere nearby, and eased toward her.

'Oh,' she said, 'I have bad news for you.'

His adam's apple moved up and down, and scurrying women jostled against him from both sides. His eye lids twitched in their outermost corners as he looked at her silently. It made him feel as though his eyes were spreading further apart. The dome-shaped slate-roofed market and the rows of stands were becoming more crowded as the women poured in to shop for dinner.

'I think we are going to leave here to go to the mountains. My mother told me we'll leave in the morning.'

He leaned closer to her, his body drooping, his long face troubled.

'Do you mean that there isn't any choice and that you'll have to go?'

Women pushed up against him as they hurried by and several times he just managed to keep his balance. A low wagon scraped against his shin bone.

'You think I want to leave here,' she pointed round to the crowded market and the long narrow streets leading to the center of the city, 'to go into those accursed empty mountains. I nearly froze last time, sometimes there's snow all the winter. But my mother told me we go and that's it.'

She was shaking her stalks at the people who passed by, and the stringy white parts of the roots kept vibrating as though with a will of their own. A woman hesitated before them, then went on; the girl turned, darting after her.

'That one took two,' she said to him when she returned to where he stood, 'sometimes you have to chase them down a whole street.'

'Would you like it if you could stay?' he asked.

'But I told you if she tells me they're going and I have to go, why I must, there's no choice.'

The women kept on pushing into him, sometimes there was a passing head between his and the girl's. He had to push back to stay near her.

'You could stay and we would be together.'

'But that would be . . . you mean you would take me with you?'

'Of course. There's nothing that says I have to travel with my group. We could live here or go anywhere.'

The gypsy girl looked up slowly at the thin tall man in the collar and the blue wool tunic.

'I don't know,' she said slowly, 'that would be very different from

anything I ever expected, but one hears that people do strange things. I think I would be afraid.'

The throng of women shoved him away from her now and he pushed and slithered his way through them back to her.

'What would you have to lose?' he said. 'It's no pleasure to be out like this every day, being trampled trying to sell those stalks and having these women go right by you. I don't have to stay with the group, I can work and we could live where we want.'

'This isn't so bad.'

'But you wouldn't have to do anything. You could cook and be there each day when I come home,' his voice had risen in pitch.

'I don't know,' she said.

The amorphous smell of freshly killed rabbits, onions, of open dripping melons was heavy and came to them through the individual cheese and breath smell of the people hurrying past. He was carried away again and battled his way back to where she stood. His thin hair was disarranged and his throat and mouth were dry from the tight collar that pressed against his adam's apple.

'But there's nothing to lose,' he repeated, 'we could . . .' a woman elbowed him going past and he gasped for breath, someone else shoved into him and he almost lost his balance. It was impossible for him to leave.

'I can't go back to wandering through these towns in this uniform when I have this chance to be unchained,' he whispered to himself and to her if she could hear him. His long face looked very sad and his thumbnail pressed into his forefingers making wide, yellow semi-circles below the joints.

'At last,' he went on even lower, 'I've had my chance to be like the people I see in the street, not alone any more, to break this bubble around me –'

He saw her very black eyes half closed as she thought, and her teeth pressing against her puffy lower lip.

'I don't know, damnit here she comes, move away quick, I don't know, I don't think so,' she whispered after him. The old gypsy woman came through the crowd quickly, many of them seemed to make room for her with her baskets slung on each arm. He let himself drift with the

wave of shawled women and found himself on the other side of the market.

He had no energy left to think. His head was full of flickering colors and there was no room for anything else. He descended at random into a narrow serpentine street that twisted its way past small alleys and store-counters that jutted out on the sidewalk. He walked until he was tired, knowing that he was missing their last street corner meeting. He wondered what they would say, not seeing him there after they began, after eight years of his being there, and how it would all sound without the small accordion that seemed to fit his long arms so well. Finally he thought of the girl, and when a couple walking close together passed by him his old feeling of embarrassment returned. When the houses got further apart he turned back toward the center of the city. It was dinner hour and the streets were much emptier. He passed the market while it was half undressed. Some of the stands were still full in the semi-darkness, the ones on wheels were being shoved away, and others were already empty and covered up. He knew of course he was going to look for the girl tonight. He knew where the round ugly trucks in which the girl and her family lived were parked. It would be almost an hour's journey for his tired legs.

Walking on the uneven dark macadam road he realized the cold had become almost biting. Now and then when a car passed, and he glided over on to the damp long grass, he could see the cloud of fog that was his breath in the passing glow. He could hear the deep irregular sounds of the crickets, and from time to time the hum of car wheels and the whisk as they passed him. He thought of the girl and of the countryside he had travelled through in his blue woollen tunic with the faint shoulder-bands of red. When one of the group would walk with him along the tree-lined countryside they were surprised by how well he knew the Latin names of the plants and birds they passed. When he was alone he liked it too, but not as much. He liked having someone to tell the names to, and he thought of the gypsy girl's dark, patiently slow face. By himself he had stretched out his long body, when the sun was strong, and fallen asleep under the trees. It had been all right until he woke up, feeling the stiffening of his body, and sensing himself completely alone and unconnected with any flesh but his own.

By the time he saw the lights of the parked trucks the cords that led from his calves felt tight and uncomfortable. He wondered how he would find her. He followed a path that branched off to the patch in which five rusty grey trucks were aimlessly parked. Walking as quietly as he could he peered into the backs of the trucks. Some seemed empty; in others the people were asleep and he could hear their slow intermittent snoring. In the third one he saw the girl who was sitting alone, her short forearm propped against the tailgate of the truck. He whistled a steady flat monotone until she turned her head and saw him. He began to walk toward her, but she waved her hand quickly until he stopped. She motioned for him to stay there. His ears becoming stiffly chilled and red, he stood waiting in the damp grass. The sky was clear with stars and he could see the puffs of his breath again. After five minutes she pushed away the curtain on the back of the truck and climbed down. She came toward him with her finger over her lips, took his hand, and walked lightly toward some silhouetted trees away from the trucks. When he stumbled twice, his foot crackling against stringy invisible roots, he felt her hands convulse in his, and he swallowed excitedly at the contact. She led him to a hacked-off tree trunk and sat down looking at the tallness of him framed against the sky.

'Can you smell fish on me?' she asked. 'It had a lot of vinegar on it tonight.' He knelt down toward her, shaking his head, and then starting to move toward her swollen-looking lips that had an oily shine in the gleam.

'Only smell me,' she giggled. 'Say why did you come out here tonight? It was lucky she was asleep already.'

'Are they still leaving?' he said heavily.

'In the morning.'

'I asked you this morning if you'd stay.'

'But they are leaving.'

'You remember I told you that I could leave this,' he pointed to his uniform, 'and work somewhere so we could live. There wouldn't be those stalks for you to sell, and I would promise to be very good to you,' his voice finished very faintly.

She said nothing.

'Well, will you?'

'I don't think I can.'

'Why?'

The girl turned and began to walk away in the general direction of the trucks, and he watched her, short with rounded grownup legs, leaving him alone with his smoothed wool tunic and the stiff white collar that chafed against his adam's apple.

He thought: 'Don't be a coward . . . I'm not one.'

The collection of curious stares he had had over the years playing his accordion on the sidewalks flashed without warning into his mind and bothered him. His anger and loneliness melted into one. He ran and caught up to her from behind, lost his balance, and fell with her on the soft grass. It was wet and he felt it soak in at his knees, but he turned her on her back and tried to find her mouth. When he reached her lips they were as soft as they had been the night before. She chuckled. She didn't move when he began to pull at her clothes on the damp grass that rubbed against them.

'Will you come with me and leave this?' he asked.

'Don't be so silly,' she said, lying out on the grass.

His desire flickered and spurted out. It was almost a relief when a pair of arms pinioned his narrow shoulders. He was twisted until he had to sit up.

'Such a skinny one you ramble onto. The market place must be a sorry sight,' a calm voice from behind said.

While two arms held him two others reached into his pockets and took out the thin wallet that he carried.

'I'm sure there's not much; these skinny ones watch their money,' the same voice said.

He was numb to it all, except the girl who stood near him without moving. He watched her carefully, deciding that if they chose to kill him he would be content as long as he knew she had nothing to do with it. She was motionless, even to her eyelids, and silent as they took his month's slim food allotment.

'Look at him trembling,' the mellow almost sweet voice went on. 'All we're going to do is tie you up if we can find enough rope for the gawkiness of you. Anyway, this way you can have something interesting to tell your family, and it looks more convincing when you're tied up.'

He could see their lithe shapes when they moved in front of him, a head shorter than he, but he had no urge to talk. He still watched the girl who had become almost rigid. One of the hands shoved something in front of him, and he heard a light metallic clinking.

'Someone once used these on me and now I use them for you, may your wrists ache like mine,' the voice said, thrusting a silverish pair of handcuffs, the catches deeply rusted, in front of his eyes. Both of them laughed and still the girl was silent, her puffy lips shiny in the glow. A hand tore the stiff collar from his tunic and tied it over his mouth, binding the ends behind his head. The men laughed and pushed him away. When he regained his balance he stood still.

'You were lucky to be treated so easily; you better get away from here,' the voice said more coldly.

He started to walk slowly in the direction he thought he had come from, at the same time trying to see the girl who still hadn't moved, pieces of grass still clinging to her heavy skirt. As he moved further away he heard a low laugh that could have come from anyone. He closed his eyes and hoped it wasn't from the girl. He could barely make out her short rounded form, still motionless, as he walked away uncomfortably with his hands behind him. When he looked again he could see nothing but the outline of the branches against the sky and the lights of the trucks. When his feet finally touched the hard macadam of the highway his thoughts were still about her.

He thought about the collar they had ripped to tie his mouth and remembered that he had an extra one in his small room, that still smelled of the girl. His legs moved awkwardly with the rope they had put around him, but he began to walk in the direction of the city, his hands uncomfortably behind him. Wondering about her, he forgot how strange he looked, his hands twisted behind his long stiff body and his mouth sealed, until it became light and the children, pointing their fingers, began to laugh at him . . .

# A Domestic Scene

by John W. Malone

They formed a domestic scene, the three of them sitting at the kitchen table eating dinner: the table was pushed up against the yellow wall and the woman Marjie and the man Tom sat at either end, with the little boy Mike placed between them. Marjie filled the plates from the stove, and twice went to the refrigerator to get more milk for her son. Knives and forks clicked against china, spoons stirred in coffee cups.

'What's wrong?' asked Tom.

'Nothing,' she said.

'Yes there is. You've hardly said a word since I came in the door.'

Marjie leaned over and wiped the dribble off her son's face. Mike reached out for his red plastic cup of milk, but as he picked it up his small hand lost its grip, the red plastic cup fell and overturned, the milk flowed along the table and trickled over the edge onto Tom's trousers before he could move.

'Clever.' He got up quickly, dabbing at his trousers with his paper napkin. Frowning at the little boy, he started to speak. But he glanced at Marjie and sat down again, silent.

'Poor, clumsy little boy.' Marjie wiped the table and the floor by Tom's chair with paper towels. 'You have to be more careful, Mike. Pick up your glass with both hands.' She patted him on the cheek, and Mike, who had been watching the results of his accident with wide, wary eyes, smiled and began to giggle.

After dinner Tom dried the dishes even though Marjie didn't want him to, and little Mike climbed up onto a stool so that he could watch his turtle in its bowl. But the turtle had withdrawn into its shell, and Mike took it out of the bowl and pushed it along the counter until it began to crawl.

'Treat it gently, Mike,' said Tom.

'Dry, if you're going to dry.'

Mike picked up the turtle and began to squirm his way down from the stool. Teetering, he dropped the turtle and hung onto the counter with both hands. The turtle lay on the floor on its back, its head and legs withdrawn.

'For God's sake, Mike, be careful.' Tom picked up the turtle and placed it back in the bowl. Mike immediately reached for it again.

'That's enough for tonight, little boy,' said Tom, lifting him off the stool.

'Leave him alone, Tom.'

'Marjie . . .'

'Just leave him alone.' She turned from the sink, and placing sudsy hands on either side of Mike's head, kissed him on the tip of his nose. 'You musn't be so rough with the turtle, darling.'

While Marjie was putting the boy to bed, Tom played Bach on the phonograph, and glanced through a book of poems by some young woman whose picture showed her sitting starkly on a huge boulder by the sea. 'Coy as coy can be, aren't they,' he said when Marjie came back into the room.

'I went to college with her.'

'Oh. Class loyalty.'

'She's a nice person and tries hard. So shut up.'

'O.K. Now. What's wrong?'

She wilted into a chair across the room from him, drawing her knees up under her. She looked at the floor, she lifted a hand and pulled at her lower lip . . .

'Come on, Marjie.'

She spoke very quietly without looking at him. 'I can't take it any more, Tom. It's a different kind of hell than Alan took me through, but it's still hell. I only thank God I don't have to go through another divorce.'

'Why is it hell, Marjie? We both get what we want.' He sighed and leaned forward on the couch. 'Why is it hell?'

'Just get out, Tom, please, just get out. I don't want any more.'

'Marjie. Marjie.' He got up and crossed to her and sat on the floor in front of her. He rubbed her bare knee where it stuck out from beneath her skirt. 'Marjie.' He reached up and lifted her chin. 'Smile, Marjie. Smile.'

She looked at him for a moment with her eyes very wide, her yellow-flecked cat's eyes, and then the lids trembled, and she began to cry and she slid out of the chair onto the floor and fell against him. He held her and rubbed his hand against the back of her neck, very slowly.

In the corner the arm of the phonograph travelled back and forth, clicking. Before they went into the bedroom, Tom removed the arm from the record and turned off the machine.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, a housecoat loosely tied around her, Marjie watched him put on his shirt. His flesh was coppery in the dim light.

'Why do you have to leave so soon?'

'I have to get up early in the morning.'

'Will you be coming tomorrow night?'

'I don't think so.'

'When?'

'As soon as I can.'

'Oh, God! When you feel like it.'

'Please, Marjie. Don't spoil it.' He pulled his tie up tight and put on his sport coat. 'Coming to the door?'

She got up from the bed and followed him out into the hall.

By the door he paused and smiled at her. Silently he looked at her. 'You've got cat's eyes, beautiful cat's eyes. Goodnight, Marjie.' He kissed her on the forehead and opened the door. She watched him going down the stairs from the apartment. 'Goodnight,' she said, almost to herself. 'Oh God, goodnight.' She closed the door and stood for a long time leaning against it, with her head in her arms and her eyes closed.

*adapted from the Middle High German*
*of Walther von der Vogelweide*

I

Thanks to the moment that let me behold her!
She that has etched on my spirit and body,
since I had rendered them to her beholden,
alters them finely as limestone is altered.
That I can never go straying from her –
that is the work of her beauty, her fineness,
and her lips of red, that laugh with such a brightness.

All of my senses enlist in her service:
honest, and graceful, and hon'rable lady.
May we be granted what justly would serve us:
all that I dared to command of her lately.
What I have gotten of good in the world –
that is the work of her beauty, her fineness,
and her lips of red, that laugh with such a brightness.

II

I've got my fief, all the world, I've got my fief!
Now I have no fear of December against my teeth,
and need the less implore each petty lord with pleas.
The noble king, the gracious king has brought me through,
that in the summer I've air, and in the winter heat.
My neighbors feel, it seems, a very great relief:
no more they stare at me and shrink, as they used to do.
Too long have I been poor without my due thanks.
I was so filled with curses, that my breath stank;
but the king's made clean the air, and all I just now sang.

III

Winter's afflicted the trees and the air;
heather and fields and hedges are bare
(many a voice had resounded there).
Girls would I see on the streets, and their hair
tumbling! robins would come to my stair.

Gladly I'd sleep all the winter away;
waking the while, I go my own way,
heedless of winter's wide-meted sway.
So will he lose all the woodlands to May:
then I press clover where snow lies today.

## Poems | by George MacBeth

MILDRED

Mildred, our batty cousin, 's been staying with us
Over the weekend. I'm worn out. On Friday
When Mummy and Daddy went to fetch her she wouldn't
Walk downstairs. Mummy said 'Come on, Mildred,
Let's pretend we're bride and groom (shall we?)
And Daddy can be the bridesmaid.' Silly games
To make her do things, childish little games
I'm sick to death of. She won't do anything
Without persuading. She'd been going out
Every day at nine. Where did she go?
No-one knows. She'd got no jobs. Twice
When the doctor made an appointment she was out
Or she wouldn't see him. He'd gone specially
As a favour to us, too. Is she absent-minded
Or just contrary? Well, we don't know which
So we're keeping her locked up at home till she's seen
The psychiatrist on Thursday. Then she'll go home

Or into a home. Her body's cracking up,
Hospital might be better. She's had two strokes.
She's fifty-eight, but she moves as if she was ninety
And she talks in this infuriating voice
You can't make head or tail of half the time
It's so jerky and slow. Then she's got kidney trouble
So you can imagine the state her flat's in.
No char would stay. And she's so bloody selfish
She'll fly off the handle at the least complaint
Or interference. 'Why can't I – come down
To the drawing – room and meet – people?' This morning
She wouldn't dress. Mummy had to put on
All her clothes: every single stitch.
And there's her money. The lawyer said for weeks
She's been drawing twenty pounds out every day
And then spending it. She bought a bubble car.
She bought this beautiful blue starred lino.
She buys Yogurt. We found twenty bottles
Of Yogurt piled up under her bed: all empty.
And about fifteen more unopened, half in
Half out of the fridge. All going bad, some stinking.
She'll spend a pound on lunch. At Coronelli's
This restaurant she goes to she leaves a pound on the table
And just walks out. She doesn't know what she's doing.
She'll sit there in the dining-room after dinner
Staring ahead of her into empty space
Without looking at anything or moving.
Perhaps she thinks she's back in the theatre.
Theatres are what she's crazy about. Her husband
Victor was manager of The Globe. She goes
Four times a week to the pictures, sits in the front row
Wearing her best clothes, claps when the film's over.
We don't want to interfere: but the neighbours
Just take advantage. As things are she can't
Live on her own, though. And you couldn't have anyone
Living in: she takes such violent

Dislikes to people. She had this Italian woman
Marcellina, once. One day she actually
*Threw* her out: bundled her out of the door
With all her bags. She was the only one

Who was doing Mildred good. She made her work,
Help clean the place up. Ugh! I pity Granny
Having to sleep in her bed again. She's worse
Than Hank. I hope to God they find some grounds
For doing something definite on Thursday.
If we don't get her certified I'll go mad.

## REMEMBERING GREYSTONES

What did I learn at Greystones, my first school?
Something from clay. I don't mean garden clay
My father sliced like fudge-lumps, broken fudge-lumps,
With a steel spade's-edge. I mean clay for playing with,
Squelching-wet, white stuff: clay mashed flat like dough
On sweating palms; dried hard in brittle spindles
Between slow fingers; caked on backs of hands
Plunged wrist-deep into whitewash in grey clay-bins
Jammed in an art-room's corner to cludge it out.
Clay taught me filth. And what did tar teach me,
Stuck to my shoes' greyed lozenge-patterned rubbers
On the baked asphalt of our melting playground?
Tar taught what fire does. Before war broke out
I'd seen a trapped boy terrified by fire
Forced by six others in a smoke-filled cellar
And kept there coughing, choked with swirling ash;
And another crouching with his tight knees browned
With diarrhoea, blubbing behind the backs
At being nicknamed 'stinker'.
My uncle died floundering through Belgian sludge
In the first World War: my father died in fire

Charred in a Sheffield blitz. Through filth and smoke
Forgotten links with those blood-ridden soldiers
Educate my will. In clay and tar
Two wars collide: fouled bodies from my childhood,
War as the art-room clay, as playground tar,
Sharpens to that boy choking, that boy jeered at:
Tears, diarrhoea: what being burned, being dirty means:
That's what I learned at Greystones, my first school.

## Poems | by Marge Piercy

### ANTÄEA

Earth is your element, and for a coat
Of arms I'd draw a rampant pot of stew.
Pain wrings a blood warm laughter from your throat.
Descent into the body quickens you.

Beautiful with the fullness of finished fruit,
Of stands of corn and wheat ripe for the sack,
Harsh, tenacious as a tree's tap root,
You've always found your strength upon your back.

Your lithe brain crackles with obscenity
Like a cat's fur brushed. Your breast,
A harvest fetish, weeps fecundity,
Bread of our bone and pillow of our rest.

Seed rubbed in the dirt to green rebirth:
A swarthy Venus rises from the earth.

## ICON

In the chapel where I could praise that will never be built
The light bleeding through one window blazons
A profiled centaur whose colors tame the sun.

See him there: hooves braced into the loam,
Banner tail streaming, burnished thighs,
Back with the sheen of china but flooded with strength.
That back nobody rides on. Instead of saddle
The naked arms and chest, the alert head
Are thrust up from the horse's supple torso
Like a swimmer who breaks water to look around,
Bur merman who neither clambers out nor drowns.

Monster? bungled marriage of thinker and beast?
No, he is whole as Plato's primeval apples:
Both the body tacking to the seasons of its needs
Like a clipper blazing with sails grasps the wind,
And the Apollo head upraised, unfaltering eyes,
Tiger lily pregnant with seeds that bows its stem.
This torso is not ridden nor this head a rider.
As the cascade is only the quickening of a river,
Here thought shoots up in a fountain to the head
And slides back through those rippled loins again.

## THE RESPONSIBLES

1. For surgeons, nurses, pray
Who shrewdly wear
A mask to undeceive.
Let them stay, let them stare,
Should the spirit leave,
At mere body, gray
As its old pain.
Let them infer,
All day, all day,
What is slain
When they err.

2. For lawyers let us plead
That law be kept
Even in high success.
Fit measure has not slept.
For in the paid guess
Of the slack judge, seed
Of justice, sown
On the rank ground,
Grows like a weed.
What is known
Shall be found.

3. And pray for the police.
Law be their will.
Self-will is law to those
Whose courage is to kill.
Wherefore these oppose
Against such sinew, peace.
Speak for them, then,
And what they bear
Until rage cease.
Pray for men
Who know fear.

## ADAGIO SETTING FOR A SUMMER'S DAY

Let there be motion; let there be prayer.
A voice wakens in the summer air.
Light is on light is quickness; touch,
Light on the eyes, lingers where much
Brightness, purchase, call of cloud, gains.
The rest (thick is the earth) remains.

Idle, we wander; loth, see the sun
Bear day downward. It is begun,
Struck, delivered. The sun shall return,
In new day, but not this day, burn.
Parable of sunlight ceaseless as air.
Let there be sunlight; let there be prayer.

## FOUR JOURNEYS

Northward you must go far,
Valleys, new valleys biding,
Till the low call is heard
Of a marsh-ruffled bird,
Singing in its hiding.
Stand like a wintry star.

Out to the West is dust.
Skulls look cool in this land
But are hot to the touch.
Do not ask there for much.
When mirages demand,
Then reply as you must.

South is pure journey. So
Thrust on your pack, travel
Strongly by sunlight, pass
The high rocks, the marsh grass,
The townships, the gravel
In the dry stream bed. Go.

Three meadows East one stays,
His company a spring
Whose water stands on stone.
Go there soon; go alone;
On bare stone lean. Drink. Bring
Gladness, for you shall praise.

# Christmas with Sir Henry

by Jeremy Brooks

I

Whenever Andrew was late for work, as on this dewy Christmas Eve morning, his lethal little Austin 7 invariably failed to start, as if sensing that under these circumstances it could cause more trouble to its master than by its normal routine of false starts, brake failure, and critical petrol stoppages. By the time he had decided to take the so-called short cut across the fields to the Hall, Andrew was breathless, sweat-soaked and aching in every limb from his fruitless exertions with the starting handle: a condition too common to arouse in him anything but resignation. About motor-cars Andrew was philosophic. He knew they hated him, and with what good cause.

As he stumbled across the sticky clay field behind the cottage, Bella's tousled head emerged from the bedroom window to shout a lovingly obscene farewell, and the three living fruits of their cheerful lusty love

crowded into the window frame behind her, waving, screaming, and punching each other with the exuberance of early morning. Andrew waved and hurried on, his feet heavy with clay, hands pocketed, whistling tunelessly, thinking about money. With Christmas and its attendent overspending now hard upon him, it was a subject never far from his thoughts. He could not now remember a time when he had not been broke and in debt, but the situation this Christmas seemed worse than usual precisely because Bella and he had expected it to be so much better. Andrew regarded work which was solely for the purpose of earning money as an almost criminal activity, but being a sensible young man knew when he was temporarily beaten; and, in theory at least, his present position as estate-manager, chauffeur, handyman, secretary, lady's maid, slave-driver, accountant and general toady to a Great Industrialist was a fair compromise: free cottage and fuel, vegetables from the Hall gardens, occasional rabbits, now and then a bird . . . all this and a living wage, all that and time to paint (in theory, again), all this and a couple of hundred a year from selling paintings . . . clover!

In practice, though, the job absorbed all his attention and energy, which meant no painting, which meant heavy drinking, which meant spending cash, which meant living on credit, no paintings to sell, bills, worry, more drink . . . ruin!

But Andrew, though concerned, was not distracted. The thought of a brand new New Year waiting just over the brow of Christmas like a sharp fresh apple waiting to be bitten, always made him happy and hopeful. Spoil-sport experience, whispering that New Years, like coffee smell better than they taste, could not dull for Andrew the bright promise of fresh experience, good resolutions, all the energy of spring: *next* year he would paint good paintings, *next* year he would hold a one-man show, create a sensation, sell paintings galore, hire a Nanny, have a honeymoon, learn Russian, get up early more often than Bella, eat fewer toffees, *next* year he would have time to get to know his children, make up stories, illustrate a children's book, build a doll's house, learn to prefer wine to beer, grow dahlias, be nice to his mother, buy some new underclothes, have more babies.

Of them all, it was only the last that was easy to achieve.

He knew that he had said all these things before, but this time (surely?)

it was different. Here he was, free cottage, living wage, time to paint, etcetera, living in beautiful countryside among congenial people; all that was necessary was to settle down; *settle down,* stop bothering, be detached, let the job become mechanical, not get *involved* . . . that was all. All, all, all.

II

There was a ditch to jump before Andrew came in sight of the Hall. He jumped it, breasted a steep rise, squeezed through a hedge of thorn bushes and there, across four hundred yards of landscaped parkland, the brutal edifice lay: Georgian gothic, crenellated, castellated, mullioned, spiral Tudor chimneys poling up like fire-twisted funnels behind the battlements: the vast grey building had, for all its vulgarity, a special kind of beauty that appealed to Andrew. He liked to think of the man or men who built it, men without fear, men who had never heard the dreaded words 'good taste', men with energy to spare, rumbustious, vulgar, excited, horribly rich men, men who threw gargantuan parties and rode lathered horses through the night, wicked, unmodern, illiberal men, men quite unlike Sir Henry. Andrew did not wish that there were such men about in England today; he just liked to think of them: 'By heaven, Martha, I've just been down to Wellesley's new place. Send for young Jack, will you, midear? Damme if I won't throw out a new wing!'

Sir Henry's bedroom, like all the inhabited rooms at the Hall, was in the centrally-heated New Wing: only servants and unimportant guests were allowed to shiver out their nights in the icy, haunted caverns of the south and east wings. From his room, through one tiny slit of window, Sir Henry was able to overlook the whole of the backyard, the garages, greenhouses, toolsheds, and it was his custom when sleeping at home which mercifully happened not more than twice a week, except when he was ill) to stumble from his bed at seven-thirty in the morning, watch in hand, and, crouching before this slit in his puce pyjamas, check the times at which his half-dozen employees arrived for work. Understandably, the longer he was kept from his warm bed by this irksome duty the more angry he became at those who, by their

tardiness, were prolonging his vigil. However, by the time he had had a further two hours' sleep, had bathed, dressed and breakfasted, he was usually in sufficient control of his temper to be able to withhold his secret knowledge until he should need it as a bargaining counter in the ceaseless war which he waged with his servants.

Andrew, believing Sir Henry to be in residence, therefore approached the Hall by a roundabout route which would enable him to obtain the sanctuary of his 'office' (a chilly anteroom to the Great Hall) without being observed; whence he could emerge, after a couple of hours of desultory bookkeeping, with the air of one too preoccupied with matters of great moment to have much regard for the petty gradations of time. His precautions this morning were, however, wasted. He was just sidling along the narrow gap between the new chicken house and the old barn when he was discovered by Arthur, the odd-job man, who, a full bucket of eggs at the end of each simian arm, appeared suddenly round the corner of the chicken-house and made purposefully for the barn.

'Ello, sleepyhead!' he greeted Andrew cheerily. 'Wasting your time, you are, chum.'

'What do you mean, wasting my time? I'm going to inspect the pullets.'

'Inspect my bottom,' said Arthur expressionlessly. 'You needn't worry, cock. The old man's not here. Kept late at the office, ha-ha. Steer clear of her ladypip, that's all. Temper? Wowee!"

Andrew, thinking without much confidence that attack was the best method of defence, asked icily: 'And where do you think you're off to with that lot, eh? There's no pullets in the barn.'

'Not pullets, no,' said Arthur enigmatically, as he walked past Andrew into the barn. Andrew followed uncertainly. Once inside the smelly, cavernous old building, Andrew could at first see nothing; then, blindly following Arthur among the rusting skeletons of abandoned agricultural machinery, he became aware of a familiar hissing noise, and caught sight of a pale blue flame burning steadily in a sheltered corner: a primus stove. All at once became clear. Arthur was having a brew-up. No wonder he always took so long to collect the eggs.

'Ere we are, cocky. What do we say to a nice cuppa char?'

As usual in such situations Andrew needed, but didn't get, time to think. According to Sir Henry's view of his duties at Sterling Hall, he ought to reprimand Arthur for wasting the estate's time, threaten him with the sack, confiscate the primus stove, and send him off on some arduous task. That, of course, was in practice out of the question. It would ruin forever the delicate balance of his relationship with Arthur, it would advance Sir Henry's cause not one inch, and it would deprive Andrew of a badly needed cup of tea.

On the other hand he felt he ought to say *something* to let Arthur know that, while Andrew's extreme broadmindedness would enable him to wink an eye at this particular caper, there were well-defined limits beyond which the winking would abruptly cease. Unfortunately Andrew had never found the right formula for conveying this information, and invariably, as now, acquiesced in the crime without a struggle.

'Ah, tea,' he said. 'Very nice too.' Feeling pleasurably guilty, he sank down on a pile of dry hay and watched Arthur darting busily to and fro as he prepared the tea.

'So Sir Henry's not back from Town yet, eh?' he mused aloud. 'What's the form now then, Arthur? When do you pack up? One o'clock?'

'Twelve o'clock, mate!' said Arthur in a shocked voice. 'Christmas Eve, twelve o'clock. His nobship'll be back by then, just you see. Wouldn't miss his little party, Sir Ennery wouldn't. You'll see.'

'Party?'

'Servants' party – that's what *he* calls it. Tisn't rightly a party, of course. Ere we are, mate, drink it while it's hot.'

'Thanks. But Arthur, what happens at this party? What do we do?'

'Well, it's like this, cocky. We all file in to the Big Hall, see, all nice and clean. And Sir Ennery, he's standing there with his bottom to the fire, and round he comes, shaking hands, see, and giving out of the Christmas boxes. Then we all has a drink, see, and we all say 'Merry Christmas, Sir Ennery' and then – well, that's where *you* come in, matey.'

*'Me?'* said Andrew (appalled).

'Ar, you. Cos you're the one what's got to start the singing, see?'

'*Singing*, Arthur?'

'What I said. You got to give us a lead, so we all start together, no false starts. Ere, you'd better practise, come on. One-er-two-er, one-er-two-er . . . FEREEZA JOLLYGOOD . . .'

'Arthur!' cried Andrew (furiously embarrassed), 'Arthur, stop it, stop it at once!'

Arthur stopped, looking hurt. Andrew tried to peer through the gloom into the inscrutably lined face of his companion to make sure that he was joking. None of this could possibly be true, he was sure; and yet . . . and yet . . . Sir Henry, in the eight years of his ownership of Sterling Hall, had succeeded in creating – so far as his duties as Chairman and Managing Director of a vast building contractors would allow – a remarkably feudal atmosphere on the Sterling estate: the Sunday processions to church, the endowed pews, the friendly cricket matches between Hall and village, the yearly fête, the uncomfortable formal visits to the cottagers, his insistence on being addressed as 'Squire' by the farmworkers . . . such a scene as Arthur had described might not seem too outlandishly archaic to this astounding little man. On the other hand, Arthur loved to take the mickey out of Andrew, and all too often succeeded. He was determined not to rise to what might be a completely fictitious bait.

'Sing if you must, Arthur,' he said condescendingly, as he stood up and brushed wisps of hay from his hairy tweed suit. 'Your respect for your employer would warm his tiny little heart, I'm sure. Just don't sing in front of me, that's all. I have a delicate ear for music.'

'Delicate arse-oles,' said Arthur. 'You'll sing, Mister-bleeding-Blunt, you'll sing your big head off before the morning's out!'

## III

Determined to discover the truth about this ludicrous story of Arthur's, Andrew sought out Pantry in the sweetly humid caves of his greenhouse. A small, energetic, grumpy man with no eyebrows, Pantry annoyed Andrew by being scathingly rude about Sir Henry behind his back, but fawning to his face. Their relationship was not made easier by there being some doubt in both their minds as to which was the

most senior in the hierarchy of estate workers. It was all very well for Sir Henry, in the privacy of his study, to wave his pudgy little white hands impatiently and say: 'It's all perfectly straightforward, Andrew. I regard you as – as – as a commisioned officer, with direct access to my ear at all times. Pantry, well, yes, Pantry *is* important in his own department, but he is a *non*-commissioned officer. The other men I regard as er – er – er – as *men,* if you take my meaning.'

Andrew took Sir Henry's meaning without difficulty, but he could hardly repeat the conversation to Pantry, who regarded his gardens as the only sane and profitable part of the estate and himself, their undisputed controller, as the lynch-pin of the Sterling Hall economy. Andrew, who addressed Pantry as 'Pantry', was not deceived by the fact that Pantry addressed him as 'Mr. Blunt'. The unspoken debate continued.

Pantry was taking readings from his thermometers when Andrew arrived. 'Aha, Mr. Blunt,' he said when he saw his visitor, 'so you're here. Have you seen her ladyship? She's after you. It's the decorations. How am I expected to have roomfuls of red and white chrysanthemums at Christmas, can you tell me that, Mr. Blunt? Said she told *you* she wanted them. I said what's the use of telling *him,* I said, who's the gardener here I'd like to know, I said, if you want something from the garden your ladyship, I said, you come to *me,* I said.'

Andrew knew perfectly well that Pantry had said nothing of the sort. 'She said nothing to me about flowers for Christmas, Pantry. Beech leaves she wanted, and beech leaves she got.'

'Beech leaves!' Pantry snorted, dismissing all such uncultivated growths to the uncertain darkness of Andrew's domain. 'And what about my elm, I'd like to know?'

'I haven't seen Sir Henry about it yet,' said Andrew defensively. He felt rather guilty about Pantry's elm, an old and quite obviously dying tree which leaned dangerously over Pantry's cottage in the direction of the prevailing wind, for he knew he would not feel comfortable if he had to sleep under its shadow himself. It ought to have come down long ago, but, knowing how sentimental Sir Henry felt about trees, he had been unwilling to broach the subject without getting an expert opinion on it first. This he now had, but had still not had a chance to talk to Sir Henry about it.

'What's it to do with Sir Henry?' Pantry demanded belligerently. 'It's my family it's going to fall on, not his. That man you had here yesterday, he was a timber merchant, wasn't he?'

'Yes.'

'And I suppose he told you it was safe as houses and would stand for ten year yet?'

'Actually, Pantry,' said Andrew, beginning to get nettled by this inquisition, 'he said it was in a dangerous condition and if he were Sir Henry he wouldn't sleep happy while it was still standing. He offered to take it down and pay ten quid for the timber.'

'When?'

'Next week. He doesn't want it if he can't have it next week.'

'So he's coming next week, is he? You're sure of that?'

'If Sir Henry agrees.'

Pantry sniffed and turned away. 'Damned if I can see why you have to ask Sir Henry every time you want to blow your nose,' he muttered, half to himself, intending to be heard. Andrew decided not to hear, but after that could hardly stay to gossip about the Christmas arrangements; and so stomped off, sucking angrily at his cigarette, without the information he had come to seek. Interviews with Pantry so often ended this way.

As Andrew passed through the back yard Humbert, the woodman and gamekeeper, rose unhurriedly from his favourite tree-stump, stuffed the *Daily Mirror* into his pocket, and made a few unconvincing passes at the chopping block with a small axe. Almost before Andrew's brief grin of greeting had left his face the axe was down, the newspaper out, and Humbart was back on his tree-stump. A man with real Officer-Like-Qualities, Andrew sadly reflected, would have a biting phrase on the tip of his tongue for such occasions as this.

## IV

Lady Glimb was speaking to Sir Henry on the telephone. Andrew hovered uncertainly outside the drawing-room door, his hand raised to knock, his head cocked to listen.

'. . . it's all very well for you, darling,' he heard, 'you don't have to

face them and I do. You know they always want to get away early on Christmas Eve, and you *will* insist on having this ridiculous . . . all right, I'm sorry, but you know how I feel about it, *so* exhausting, and if we've all got to *wait* . . .'

Andrew found that he was grinning, and had to wipe the grin off carefully in case it should become fixed there, and be discovered. It wasn't so much what Lady Glimb was saying that made him want to explode into mad laughter (though he sickly realised that it probably confirmed at least part of Arthur's tale) as the way in which it was said: in a breathless, furious rush, into which somehow the languid and the frenetic were equally blended. Why were women of almost infinite leisure invariably in such a tearing hurry?

'. . . yes, yes, yes, darling, I'll get Andrew to speak to them, but *do* hurry, and, darling, *do* be careful how you drive . . . yes, yes, yes . . . Oh yes . . . oh al-*right*. Goodbye.'

Andrew would have given a lot to know what had prompted the final petulance. He retreated silently from the door, walked noisily towards it, tapped, and entered the room. Lady Glimb, a slim, trim woman in her forties with a professionally bright manner and a perpetual expression of extreme harassment, sat sideways at her bureau, neat knees together, back straight, head back, making notes in her desk diary. She switched on her quick, upper-servants smile for Andrew, switched it off again, and went on writing. Andrew waited.

It was a pleasant room, tastefully furnished, and full now of pale winter sunlight; but the closed windows and central heating made it stuffy, it smelled of dogs and the musky scent that Lady Glimb used to excess. Apart from the copies of *Vogue* and the richly illustrated volumes about English Stately Homes, the books had a sad, unused air. The pictures were horrible.

'Well, now, Andrew,' said Lady Glimb briskly, turning towards him and folding her well-made hands in her well-tweeded lap, 'we've a mass of things to do. First of all there's the decorations – you'll have to help me with those, I'm afraid I've rather left it and Sir Henry will be *furious* if they're not ready when he gets home . . . oh, and that reminds me, will you tell the men that Sir Henry can't get back from Town

until twelve, so it will be a quarter past, *a quarter past* for his little party . . . I know, you needn't look at me like that, Andrew, I *told* him you'd be furious . . . oh, and he wants your weekly report as soon as he arrives so that he can get it all over before lunch. Now what else?'

Andrew mentioned, without enthusiasm, the list of urgent decisions which he had been presenting daily for weeks past.

'Don't be such a bore, Andrew,' said Lady Glimb, turning her back on him sharply to consult her list. 'You can tell Hans we shall want about a dozen glasses, he can set them out on the refectory table in the Great Hall, the end near the fire. Make sure Humbert has enough logs in, Sir Henry likes a really big blaze at Christmas and that hall's like an icebox anyway. *You* could wrap up the Christmas boxes, couldn't you?' Lady Glimb smiled up winningly at Andrew, but Andrew was not won: he continued to regard her stonily, remarking the curious way in which she could smile with the lower half of her face only, as if her eyes and brow could be disconnected, at the throw of a switch, from the whole smiling mechanism. Andrew felt that it was almost his duty not to respond to such meaningless grimaces.

'If Sir Henry wants the weekly report by twelve o'clock,' he said expressionlessly, 'I'd better do that first, hadn't I? I'm afraid it's rather a long one this week. There's all that about Pantry's elm . . .''

'Oh, Andrew!' cried Lady Glimb in an agonised voice, '*must* you? – and at *Christmas,* too!'

'I'm afraid I must. I have to have a decision this weekend or not at all. I'll get it done as quickly as possible.'

'It's not that, so much, but you know how Sir Henry feels about his trees, and I *don't* want him upset on Christmas Eve! You will be careful, now, won't you, Andrew?'

'Well, of course,' said Andrew, as if surprised that she should ever think him anything less than careful; and stood staring at her for a moment, savouring this tiny morsel of power.

'Be as quick as you can, then, that's all,' said Lady Glimb, turning back to her desk. Andrew realised that he had been dismissed. If only, he moaned to himself as he left the room, he could have stalked out a moment before . . .! Why did he always let her win?

V

In fact the report did not take long. The business of Pantry's elm was perfectly straightforward. The timber merchant's offer would stand for a week; if it were not accepted the tree would have to take its chance through the January gales. His verdict had been unequivocal, and he had thrown in, for good measure, a lot of useful advice about the thinning and planting of the coverts, the approximate value of a number of other mature or dying trees, and a lecture on the advantages of longterm planning. All this Andrew incorporated, with a pleasant sense of being on top of his job, in his report.

There was little else to say. Nothing of note had been accomplished on the estate in the past week. A drain had been lengthened; the roof of an empty cottage had been partially stripped, ready to receive new timbers; Andrew had driven Lady Glimb into Hemel Hempstead, where she had spent five hours – happily coinciding with opening time at the pubs – buying Christmas presents for people who had been forgotten during her London shopping expeditions; Humbart had discovered, but left undisturbed, a badgers' holt, and wanted to know whether to dig it out or not; egg production was down again – a direct result of Sir Henry's insistence that the weather was still too mild for artificial heat; the Land-rover had broken its half-shaft for the third time, and Andrew suggested that a new differential would come cheaper in the long run – longing to add that a new Head Gardener (whose erratic driving was the real cause of the breakages) would be more to the point . . . Typed in triplicate, the report occupied three quarto pages and was finished by eleven o'clock. Andrew would have prolonged the task if he could have thought of anything more to say. He dreaded the complications that faced him in the cruel outer world.

He looked at his list. There was still much to do and less than an hour to do it in. From his office he could hear Lady Glimb twittering distractedly in the Great Hall. He filed the third copy of his report. The second he placed in a tray marked ATTENTION LADY GLIMB. The top copy, together with the petty-cash account and the chit from the egg-packing station, Andrew placed on the enormous leather-topped desk in Sir Henry's study; and then went forth to join the fray.

VI

As noon approached the tempo of activity inside and outside Sterling Hall increased minute by minute. Even the lugubrious Pantry, recklessly denuding his hot-houses to provide Lady Glimb with enough flowers for her elaborate table-pieces, was caught up by the general air of anxious, busy excitement. Humbart's surly acquiescence on being asked to provide enough logs to feed the gigantic fire that the Great Hall demanded had turned, when next Andrew saw him, to the awed glee of a small boy at a Guy Fawkes bonfire. 'Hey, Andy!' he cried (making Andrew turn sharply to see whether Lady Glimb had overheard the authority-sapping familiarity), 'how's this for a blaze-up, eh, boy?' Hans, the blue-jowled houseman, sped to and fro with trays of gleaming glasses, saucers of salty biscuits, clearly revelling, in his dark teutonic way, in the unaccustomed unity of the household: deceived, for a moment, into thinking that these English were actually going to enjoy themselves. Len, the leatherskinned assistant gardener, who normally did not utter from one month's end to the other, remarked pleasantly to Andrew in passing: 'You got the ceegars, Mr. Blunt? We allus 'as ceegars at Christmas, you know.' Andrew dashed off to consult Lady Glimb.

At five minutes to twelve, with the fire blazing heartily, the decorations complete, the Christmas boxes wrapped and labelled, the drinks ready and the floor of the Great Hall swept clean of stalks and tinsel ends and discarded evergreen, there was still no sign of Sir Henry. 'You'd better start collecting the men, though,' said Lady Glimb, as she peered anxiously through the mullioned windows and down the long, mist-shrouded drive. 'Sir Henry wouldn't miss his own little party, not for anything in the *world,* he wouldn't!' Talking to keep her courage up, thought Andrew, as he made his way down bleak corridors towards the well-equipped kitchen. Here he found, already assembled, Pantry, Humbert and Len, Mrs. Pantry, Mrs. Eckersley (who could run the Hall single-handed if necessary, and frequently said so), Hans and Gerda (dustpan in hand, ready to swoop on fallen ash or a flake of alien mud), and Alex, the pimply youth from the estate agent's office in Hemel Hempstead, who had somehow got himself accepted as an honorary servant of the Hall. Most of the men were in stockinged feet – on Gerda's insistence. They stood about in stiff, formal little groups, chatting in subdued voices like gate-crashers at a difficult party. Into the silence

created by Andrew's entrance, Humbert's coarse, virile laugh rang out, and was abruptly smothered. Andrew counted heads.

'Everyone except Arthur,' he announced. 'Has anyone seen Arthur?' Mrs Everton sniffed expressively – she knew where he'd be if *she* had any say in it! – and Hans volunteered an obscurely worded statement to the effect that Arthur had been seen in the moat. 'Swimming?' asked Humbert, with heavy humour. 'Ja!' said Hans, with approval.

'Humbert, go and look for him, for pity's sake!' said Andrew. 'Tell him Sir Henry's waiting for him. Tell him *everyone's* waiting for him. Tell him anything you like, but get him back here as sharp as you can. The show,' he added grandiloquently, 'must go on!'

As Humbert left the kitchen Andrew was approached, a little shyly, by Mrs. Pantry. She had a carrier-bag in her hand which she thrust clumsily towards Andrew and then backed away, leaving him clasping the thing stupidly. Andrew strained to catch the burthen of her whispering – something about Christmas trees. He peered bemusedly into the bag. There were several parcels, each neatly wrapped in gay decorative paper, each firmly secured by gold and silver string, from which dangled a small white label with a picture of Father Christmas in one corner. 'To Nicholas,' he read, 'with best wished from Hilary.' (Hilary was the Pantrys' youngest child, aged two.) 'To Mr. Blunt, with Xmas Greetings from Mr. and Mrs. Pantry.' Andrew groaned, almost audibly: and he hadn't sent them so much as a Christmas card! He took out the parcel addressed to himself and made a great show of feeling its shape and holding it up to the light. 'Now, now!' said Pantry sternly, amidst giggles from the others, 'not to be opened till Christmas Day, Mr. Blunt. You know the rules.' Andrew felt that he must be gaping stupidly: this was the man against whom he had waged a long, merciless war of attrition! He said hurriedly: 'I say, thank you, Pantry, thank you very much Mrs. Pantry, you shouldn't have, you really shouldn't . . .' In a state near to panic he made for the door. 'Must see where Humbert and Arthur have got to,' he muttered; and, to himself: must get car going, go village, buy presents, hell's bells.

Andrew wandered aimlessly through the outhouses for a while, shouting occasionally, without much hope, for Humbert and Arthur. When he returned to the back door he found his two quarries chatting

aimiably together on the white-washed step, where Arthur had sat to remove his boots. 'God in Heaven!' he cried, 'where the devil have you been, Arthur? Don't you realise that Sir Henry and the whole household are waiting for you?'

'Ho, very likely,' agreed Arthur, without looking up from his boots. Humbert grinned weakly. Andrew pushed past and made straight for kitchen. They were all still there except Pantry. 'Said he wanted to speak private to Sir Henry,' said Mrs. Pantry apologetically. Andrew groaned weakly and shot off down the passages towards the Great Hall. Here Lady Glimb still hovered anxiously, though the main cause of her anxiety had now been removed.

'Sir Henry's arrived!' she announced triumphantly. 'Have you got everyone together, Andrew? We don't want Sir Henry to have to wait about, do we? He's just having a word with Pantry, he'll be coming in any moment now.' Side by side they peered out into the pearly gloom. Sir Henry, a tiny, sagging figure in a double-breasted blue pin-stripe suit that looked as if it had been made for a much larger man, stood impatiently beside his car on the gravelled driveway, listening with an air of resigned fury to Pantry's measured urgencies. In one hand he held a rolled umbrella and a briefcase, in the other a bowler hat. Andrew experienced an unexpected moment of pity for this weary, diminutive figure, around whom the whole great world of Sterling Hall revolved.

Suddenly, with a word and a nod, Sir Henry dismissed Pantry and turned away to approach the great iron-studded oak doors of his castle. This was the moment for which Lady Glimb had been waiting and watching. She skipped past Andrew, flung back one of the enormous doors, and rushed out into the vaulted porch, her arms flung wide, her face radiant, like a little girl tripping forward eagerly to embrace a favourite uncle. And back to Andrew, hovering uncertainly in the Great Hall, floated her ecstatic cry: 'Who's a good, good, *goo-ood* boy!'

## VII

Disencumbered of his hat, umbrella and briefcase, Sir Henry marched briskly across the Hall towards his study. 'Ah, Andrew,' he cried, as he marched past, 'give me five minutes, will you, my boy? Not a moment

more than five minutes!' Gone were the drooping shoulders, the pinched eyes, the general air of exhausted loneliness that had enveloped him a few moments before. Had Lady Glimb and her schoolgirl ecstacies wrought this miraculous change, wondered Andrew, or was it that magic moment when he crossed the threshold between the cold realities of business and the dream world of Sterling Hall? Thinking thus, as he made his way back towards the kitchen regions, Andrew's mind was illuminated suddenly by a vision of Sir Henry in the role of a human being: a vulnerable creature like himself, compounded of hopes, fears, and known failings, apprehensive of solitude, trapped by his own talent . . . The vision faded as quickly as it had bloomed. It was too incredible to hold.

'Five minutes,' he announced, as he entered the kitchen. 'Sir Henry's in his study, and he wants us all in the Hall in five minutes. So for Pete's sake don't anyone go skipping off.' He looked meaningfully at Arthur, who grinned blandly. 'Ready with your party piece, mate?' asked Arthur. Andrew ignored him.

The five minutes passed slowly in the kitchen. Although, during working hours, any small gathering of workers would chat animatedly together for a quarter of an hour at a time, and find difficulty in tearing themselves away from each other's fascinating conversation, now, cooped up together with nothing to do but talk, all were silent. From time to time someone would crack a feeble joke ('What are They having for Christmas dinner, Hans? Roast building-blocks?') or a crude joke ('What are you going to do with your ceegar, Gerda?') but the laughter was nervous laughter, and no-one in the room, save perhaps Mrs. Eckersley, whose eyes were closed in patient suffering, could keep themselves for long from glancing at the electric clock above the refrigerator.

After four minutes Andrew darted along the passage and peered into the Great Hall. It was empty. When he got back to the kitchen, Len and Humbert were both missing. 'Spending tuppence,' said Arthur. Andrew's nerves began to crack. Once more he walked – slowly this time – up the passage to peer hopelessly into the empty cavern of the Hall. But now it was not empty. Sir Henry was standing, legs astride, in front of Humbert's mountainous fire, both hands stroking his warm little

buttocks. Lady Glimb, in a fur coat, was fussily adjusting her decorations.

'Ah, Andrew, there you are, thought you'd got lost or something. All present and correct? Let's have them in, then, eh?'

Andrew's stomach felt ominously hollow, and he wondered if he were actually going to be sick, and, if so, why. Arthur, Pantry, and the estate agent's boy had now all left the kitchen. 'Wee-wee,' said Hans, smiling happily, miming that activity in case Andrew had not understood. Andrew bolted for the back door. 'Pantry! Humbert! Arthur!' he yelled as he shot out into the back yard. They were all there, leaning negligently against the walls, smoking and chatting happily. Those that wore no boots were standing on sheets of newspaper. The atmosphere in the kitchen had finally become too much for them. Andrew, momentarily transported by his rage back to his days as a corporal in the R.E.M.E., roared at them: 'Get fell in! Get moving, you lousy lot! You want to keep Them waiting all morning?'

Like magic the horrible formula had effect. Cigarettes were pinched out, there was a quick shuffle to sort out the order of seniority, and in a moment the little column was moving in through the back door, past the kitchen (whence the waiting females, and Hans, skipped like well-disciplined troops into their appointed places), and down the passage to the Hall. Andrew sped on ahead, opened the door and – being a little cowardly in social matters – held it open until the last of the procession had passed through. Arthur, as he passed Andrew, whispered respectfully: 'That was better, Mister Blunt, that was a *lot* better!'

## VIII

All fell out more or less as Arthur had foretold. The line of employees formed up, as if to a prearranged plan, into a shallow arc pivoting about the focal point of their employer, who retained his position – the olny tolerably warm one in the Hall – before the blazing pile of logs. Lady Glimb darted hither and thither, handing out glasses of rich, dark port: a curious drink to select, Andrew thought, but an intelligent choice when you worked out the alternatives. He was at first too busy with his own incredulity at the scene before him to think much of his social

duties, but soon recovered enough to offer his services to Lady Glimb as a drink dispenser. But, 'No, no!' she whispered roguishly, 'this is *your* party, Andrew! Just for today, *I* am the servant!' Andrew retired, baffled, to his place at the eastern tip of the arc.

Conversation was not easy. Everyone sipped their port, tongued their lips, held their glass up to the light, and said 'Ah!' Mrs. Eckersley, after sniffing her wine suspiciously, tasted it and announced with satisfaction: 'Rich Ruby. We drink it at home.' Len said something in a low voice to Pantry, who chuckled appreciatively and, with closed eyes, raised his head with an air of sumptuous well-being utterly alien to his character. By this time everyone was equipped with a glass of port: Andrew's was already nearly empty. Sir Henry swept the arc with his eye, raised his glass, and spoke ringingly towards the chandelier.

'Lady Glimb and I . . . both wish you all . . . a very merry Christmas . . . and a prosperous New Year.'

'Here, here!'

'Merry Christmas!'

'Cheers!'

'Happy Christmas, Sir Henry.'

The muttering of these and similar sentiments lasted for some time. Everyone sipped their port. Sir Henry clearly thought that it was now time for general conversation. 'Well, Baker,' he said jovially (Baker was Arthur's surname), 'what sort of week d'ye have, eh? Busy?'

'Not so bad, sir,' said Arthur, evasively.

'Pullets laying well?'

'Fair to middling, sir.'

'Been laying the new drain, have you?'

'That's it, sir.'

'Cold work, eh?'

'Bit chilly sometimes, sir.'

'Be glad when it's finished, though?'

'Oh, I dunno, sir. Work's much of a muchness, sir. All bad.'

The assembled company, which had been listening with respectful attention to this exchange, roared appreciatively at Arthur's daring sally. Arthur's a case, their laughter said, there's nothing creepy about Arthur. After the laughter came another silence, which Andrew thought it his

duty to fill. Humbert, to whom he wished to address his remarks, was opposite him, at the other tip of the arc, so he was obliged to lean forward and raise his voice in order to make it clear that he was not speaking to his immediate neighbours.

'I say, Humbert,' he called. 'Have you told Sir Henry about Spot's fight with the rat?'

'What!' cried Sir Henry. 'Not *Spot!*'

'Not fighting with a *rat!*' cried Lady Glimb.

'Ah,' said Humbert, reminiscently, 'that were a real fight, that.' Very slowly, and very badly, he told the story. All present listened avidly to the oft-repeated tale. Andrew had himself told it, rather more efficiently, to Sir Henry and Lady Glimb, and he had now nothing but admiration for their cries of surprise and wonder as the awesome chronicle unfolded.

'Well,' breathed Lady Glimb, 'I just wouldn't have thought Spot had it in him!'

'Ah, he's a rare old dog, is Spot,' said Humbert, with satisfaction.

There arose at this point a dispute, eagerly fanned from all sides, between Humbert and Len as to whether Spot was or was not a better gun-dog than Sally, recently deceased. This temporary relief from social tension enabled Andrew to take his mental bearings once more. His first flush of astonishment that this archaic, artificial ceremony should occur at all had faded, to be replaced by a more complex, and more worrying, reaction. For Andrew had by now apprehended something far more surprising than the mere occurrence of this event which Sir Henry had devised as a prop to his squirearchical self-portrait: the servants and workers, from Pantry downwards, *were all actually enjoying themselves!* Granted that all of them were socially ill-at-ease, that most of them were uncomfortably cold (for only Sir Henry and his wife were actually within range of the fire's influence), that a single glass of port was a ludicrously insufficient stimulation, and that the unbroken arc in which they stood was a daunting hindrance to conversation: nevertheless the gathering had achieved, almost against the will of its component parts, a sort of corporate solidarity, as if everyone were thinking to themselves, in the midst of their discomfort: *this is the real thing: here, under this historic roof, we have gathered together to preserve the last shattered*

*remnants of a great social system; we are demonstrating our national conviction that, though some are born to have and some born to have not, all men are equal in the eyes of the Lord: it is such moments of affirmation as this that made Great Britain Great.*

It was not, Andrew realised, that the difference between Sir Henry's £200 per week (plus expenses) and their own £7.16.0. per week (less expenses) had for a moment been forgotten: Sir Henry's position as the fulcrum round which the arc articulated served to emphasise rather than conceal this; and, by emphasising, to draw attention to that inherited breadth of imagination which allowed him to acknowledge them as human beings. For his part, Andrew felt like a stranger in their midst, who had no real right to be there at all. He could not share their temporary euphoria. He longed to jump forward and remind them that this was the woman whom they daily dismissed with contemptuous dislike, this the man whom they knew, from bitter experience, to be ruthless, suspicious, and mean. But it would do no good – would, in fact, probably do considerable harm. There is no point in destroying another person's convention just because you find it difficult to accept yourself.

Lady Glimb was now distributing the presents. Andrew received his own box of fifty cigarettes (which he had himself wrapped and labelled) with an embarrassed little bow. Following Lady Glimb, as Arthur had predicted, came Sir Henry. 'Ah, Andrew!' he said, as they shook hands limply, 'this makes it just about a year you've been with us, doesn't it? Well, it's – it's – it's –' For a moment it looked as though he really could find nothing at all to say; but then, with labour, he found the phrase: 'It's good to have you with us, my boy. A Happy Christmas to you and your family, and may I have a word with you in my study as soon as we're finished here?'

Andrew grinned and nodded and made his little bow again, and altogether felt a complete fool. The cogs of his brain whirred tumultuously, but inconclusively, as he watched the little procession – so much like an inspection by a visiting General – proceed from unit to unit down the line. As Sir Henry reached the other end of the arc, handed out the last parcel, shook the last hand, Andrew found that Arthur had somehow materialised beside him.

'Your cue, Mr. Blunt, sir.'

'What?'

'Your cue. This is where we sing, mate.'

'Don't be funny.'

'*Funny?* I'm dead serious, chum. Come on, be a sport. You want to spoil Sir Ennery's Christmas? Now then, one-er-two-er, one-er-two-er-three: Fereeza jollygood . . .'

Up to the last moment Andrew was convinced that Arthur was pulling his leg: it was too ridiculous, no-one could be quite as hypocritical as that. But then, as Arthur hoarsely, and none too quietly, whispered the first line of the song, Andrew realised that all eyes, save those of Sir Henry and Lady Glimb, were upon him; and upon Sir Henry's lips there hovered a tiny smile of anticipation.

Andrew experienced a moment of sheer panic. He couldn't do it, there was no question about that. Let them sing if they wanted to, but he, Andrew, was simply incapable of stepping forward and pronouncing this preposterous lie. Arthur was nudging him again, and this time his muted solo was loud enough to be heard by everyone. 'Fereeza jollygood fel-low!' he wheezed nasally, looking up encouragingly into Andrew's face; and from scattered places in the otherwise silent arc of figures there came the faint muttering of people who are prepared to sing, but not alone: as if an exploratory breeze had sighed briefly about the tree-tops, calling forth notes of promise and encouragement from the waiting branches.

'Well, ladies and gentlemen . . .' said Sir Henry, smiling uncertainly.

Andrew stepped forward, 'Sir Henry . . . Lady Glimb . . . I'd like to say, to say, on behalf of all of us, that we, that you, well, thank you for your hospitality, and we, er, wish you, er, both a very merry Christmas, er. Er, thank you.'

Disappointment and agreement seemed, to Andrew's ears, mixed equally in the murmurs that followed this speech. Sir Henry waved his hands in interlocking circles in front of his chest. 'Thank you, Andrew, thank you, everyone. Have a good Christmas and, ha-ha, don't be late on Thursday morning!'

Everyone laughed heartily. The first undisciplined movement towards the door rapidly became more orderly, and after a moment's

confusion the file was shuffling quietly out of the Great Hall in the reverse order to its entry. Andrew hung back near the door, knowing that he would have to go straight into Sir Henry's study. Arthur, as he passed, did not look at him, but he said one word: 'Coward!' Andrew knew that he meant it.

## IX

Sir Henry was ensconced in miniscule splendour behind the vast leather acreage of his desk when Andrew entered the study. He was reading the weekly report, and waved Andrew to a chair without taking his eyes from the typed pages. After a wait that, for Andrew, became increasingly agonising as it lengthened, Sir Henry at last looked up, removed his glasses, and fixed his eyes on a point some six inches above Andrew's head.

'Andrew,' he said heavily, 'you have made an absolutely *appalling* blunder.'

'Eh?' said Andrew. 'I've done what?' His mind, still running on his recent failure to lead the expected paean of jolly praise, reeled off madly into a forest of absurd excuses.

'Whatever possessed you,' said Sir Henry slowly, 'to *tell Pantry what the timber merchant said?* You must have been out of your mind!'

Andrew's mind spun slowly to rest. A cool, bracing wind blew out the confusions of the past hour as if they had never been. He said carefully: 'I'm afraid I don't quite understand you, sir. Pantry saw Mr. Hobhouse inspecting the elm. Naturally, when he asked me what the verdict was, I told him.'

'Do you realise,' said Sir Henry patiently, 'that Pantry won't give me a moment's peace, now, until that elm has been removed?'

'Well, sir, it will have to *be* removed, won't it? I mean, I wouldn't have asked for an expert opinion if it hadn't already shown signs of being in a dangerous condition, and Hobhouse simply confirmed what we already suspected.'

'What *you* suspected, Andrew,' corrected Sir Henry quietly; 'you and that hysterical idiot Pantry. How many other 'expert' opinions have you had?'

'There hasn't been time to get more than the one. I've treated it as a matter of urgency, and I should have thought . . .'

'I don't believe you've done any thinking on the subject at all, Andrew. How many times have I told you that nothing on this estate – absolutely *nothing* – is to be sold without first getting two or more offers for it?'

Andrew, though by now sick with nervousness, was at the same time beginning to feel pleasurably angry. He sat up alertly in his chair and braced himself for something more spectacular than the familiar diatribe against wasting money.

'I think I explained in my report, sir,' he said, 'that Hobhouse is not interested in the elm unless he can have it next week. He is the only timber merchant in the district, and it might be months before I could persuade another one to come here from even further away. By that time the sap will have started rising, and they won't want to touch the elm until October, at the earliest. You told me yourself – and everyone else here agrees – that we can expect the worst gales in January and February. I should have thought it was self-evident that the tree should be removed while we have the chance.'

Sir Henry sucked one ear-hook of his spectacles, and examined the beautifully moulded ceiling above Andrew's head. He murmured thoughtfully: 'You would have thought it self-evident, would you? I suppose it was not also self-evident that Clodhouse, or whatever the man's name is, thought – quite correctly – that he was on to a soft touch?'

'How do you mean, sir?'

'Unlike you, Andrew, this man is a businessman. His job is to make money, not to give free advice to ignorant amateurs. Put yourself in his position. It must have been as clear to him as it is to me that you know next to nothing about forestry. I've no doubt he spun you a long tale about the various tests he could make to prove whether that elm was sound or not. Am I right?'

'Quite right, sir,' said Andrew grimly.

'Right. So he then proceeded to apply these tests. Not unnaturally – if you remember his main object in life – the so-called tests showed that the tree was rotten right through, precariously held from falling by a

single root which might at any moment prove to be overburdened. Right?'

'Right,' said Andrew.

'Our friend next makes a great show of being reluctant to have anything to do with the tree. He points out how difficult it is going to be to get the tree down without damaging the surrounding buildings. He demonstrates that it will require a tractor and ten men, and he gives a terrifying estimate of the cost of such an operation. When you say that the tree must be worth a good deal in timber, he reminds you that it is rotten right through and he might well find himself landed, after all that trouble and expense, with nothing but a worthless, hollow shell.'

Andrew was appalled. Sir Henry had traced, with almost supernatural accuracy, the exact course of the transaction between himself and Mr. Hobhouse. He had behaved like an innocent, unthinking fool. He could not understand why Sir Henry was still treating him with such gentle reasonableness. The man would be justified in throwing a towering rage.

'But then,' Sir Henry continued quietly, 'having reduced you to a state in which you would agree to practically anything in order to see the back of that terrible tree, out of the kindness of his heart, and because he doesn't like to see a pal in a difficult position, he agrees to take a chance on it. He offers you a token payment of £10 for the timber, although he expects, when he gets the tree down, that he'll find he's making a loss on the deal. You are lucky, he says, that he does in fact urgently need a small quantity of unseasoned elm next week, and he can probably salvage enough from this rotten old tree to meet his requirements. But if he can't have it next week, he doesn't want it at all. And he warns you that if you don't sell it pretty quickly, you won't be able to sell it until next October – a fact which is very likely untrue. *In fact,'* added Sir Henry, leaning forward and tapping the desk-top to emphasise his words, *'in fact,* his tests have shown him that the tree is perfectly sound and probably worth, as timber, something like a hundred and thirty pounds. Has he rung you up yet to ask for my go-ahead?'

'Yes,' said Andrew.

'Shows he's keen,' said Sir Henry. He sat back in his chair; selected,

pierced and lit a cigar; and waited patiently for whatever Andrew might find to say.

Andrew felt that the world was breaking up on every hand. He had known that there was going to be opposition to his proposals over this elm, if only because Sir Henry was notoriously sentimental about all his trees. But he had thought himself on such firm ground! The issue was simple and clear. Any hesitations on Sir Henry's part could be met with hard fact and at the same time he, Andrew, would be performing his proper duty in the world as a champion of the working classes against the inhumanity of wealth. He had, he remembered sadly, at one moment even relished the thought of the coming conflict. But now . . .!

Wearily, Andrew gathered the scattered remnants of his code. 'That's all very well, sir,' he said slowly. 'It may well be that Mr. Hobhouse is, as you suggest, dishonest and a blatant liar – though you have no real grounds.'

'One moment!' cried Sir Henry, holding up one tiny plump hand like a policeman on point-duty. 'I did not suggest that he was dishonest and a blatant liar. I simply suggested that he was a businessman, and could be expected to behave like one.'

'If that's what business is like, then,' cried Andrew hotly, 'I'm glad I'm not a businessman. I still say you may be slandering Hobhouse, who struck me as a very decent type of man, but *even if you aren't,* even if he is as deceitful as you think, I still say that that elm should come down.'

'Oh? And how do you reach that conclusion, young man?'

'Because there's an element of doubt involved! We haven't time, before the bad weather starts, to find out the real facts. The tree may be unsound or it may not. If it stood anywhere else it wouldn't matter, but where it is, leaning the way it does, even the slightest suspicion that it might be unsound ought to be enough to condemn it without another thought.'

'And throw away something like a hundred pounds?'

'Certainly!' said Andrew, with deep conviction. 'If it did fall, it would carry away part of the garden wall, both the workshops, and . . .'

Sir Henry leaned forward, his hand raised again. 'Surely, Andrew,' he said, 'I don't have to remind you that everything on this estate is insured? *Everything!*'

'If you had let me finish, I was going to say, and end up crushing the kitchen of Pantry's cottage. A woman and three children live in that cottage, Sir Henry.'

Andrew felt better now. He had lost his grip for a moment, and no doubt he had been very gullible in dealing with Hobhouse, but the principle, once he had caught up with it, remained the same. Nothing Sir Henry could say could alter that.

But what Sir Henry did say was so staggering that for a moment Andrew thought he must have misheard.

'Andrew,' he said softly, 'I am insured for damage to persons as well as to places.'

Andrew gaped. 'What – what did you say, sir?'

'I said,' said Sir Henry patiently, 'I am insured for damage to persons as well as to places.'

It was a long time before Andrew, struggling with his rage and incredulity, could make his muscles work again. Then he stood up. He could find nothing to say – nothing at all. He knew that he was trembling, but felt no sense of shame at this weakness. Shame would come later, and have a different cause. Sir Henry, his glasses once more obscuring his eyes, appeared to be regarding Andrew with mild, zoological interest.

'I think I'd better go, sir,' said Andrew at last.

Sir Henry did not misunderstand. 'I think perhaps you'd better, Andrew,' he said kindly. 'You've done valiantly. Don't think I don't appreciate the effort you've put into trying to adapt yourself to an unfamiliar job. For a man without previous experience of estate management I think you've put up a remarkably good show. But I'm afraid the truth is that you just haven't got a head for business – I'm sure you'd agree to that yourself. And what a place like this needs, pre-eminently, is a real *businessman*.'

'Yes, sir,' said Andrew, though he had not heard a word.

'I won't keep you any longer, then. Enjoy your Christmas, Andrew, and of course take your time about making – er – other arrangements. And my regards to your wife.'

'Yes, sir. Of course. Thank you, sir. Goodbye.'

## I. THE FIRST PARTY

They keep saying about the Party. There is a parting in my hair. I can't make it come, but Nanny can, quick as anything. She ties on the big pink bow. 'Ow!' 'Fusspot,' says Nanny. I can see a fafe (that's a pottie) full of fuss, all frothy like the waves spit out on the beach. I told the dolls about Party. I put it into each of their ears. My legs are part of my body.

'What is a Party, Nan?'

Nan's eyes jump under her frizzy hair which is laughing all the time. Tramlines come on her face. My little red car would like to run along those.

'A party?' Her eyes bounce about. 'Bless my soul. What next! It's lots of girls and boys, and they play games, and have a lovely time. There'll be balloons and jellies, I should think. Turn round now and let me do you up.'

My best dress has long ribbons, six each side of my middle. They fly when I run.

'Stand still, now.'

I like to stroke them. The blue ones are called Pig and Sand. They are my best ones.

'Teddy wants ribbons too.'

'They're only for girls,' says Nan.

'Teddy is sometimes a girl, specially Saturdays.'

Nanny makes a little noise at my nails.

'Scissors . . . scissors . . . where are they . . . Can't see for looking!' she laughs and picks up the scissors. She cuts my nails and her chin waggles. Her mouth looks like it's eating something nasty, spinach perhaps.

'I can't help it. I have to, when I'm cutting nails. Now, your dancing shoes.'

'No. Red shoes.'

'Not for a party. You must have your best.'

'Red shoes are my best. I don't want dancing shoes.'

'Nuff said.'

Nan opens her mouth a tiny way, so I stop.

Dancing shoes have snappy elastic. They are shiny and soft like pussies. There are black bobbles. When I touch them my tummy is full of fur.

'What is Teddy wearing for Party?'

'Teddy isn't going to the party. He wouldn't enjoy himself. Far rather stay at home.'

'Party must be horrid.'

'Stuff and nonsense. You'll love it. It's your cousin Anne's birthday, and you're taking her a present.'

'How old is she?'

'Ten. That means Maureen must be thirteen now. Hardly seems possible. Tall, both of them. And their mother such a slip. Of course, the Major is a fair height. Such a shame Anne takes after him . . .'

Nanny's voice runs under the bed and out the other side, then it jumps over the chair and goes in and out of the things on the dressing-table. And more is coming out of her mouth all the time, like my ribbons, but going on longer. Anne and Maureen are tall for their ages. I don't want them to be. In Church it's like a forest going up. I'm only as far as the hymn books which have a funny sniff.

'Now is that everything?'

Nan's eyes go pecking round the room.

'Stop here and I'll fetch Anne's present. Don't get dirty, whatever you do.'

Nanny's shoes squeak as if her hurrying hurt them. I look in the mirror and I'm not sure if it's me. I creep into Mummy's room. There's nobody coming. I run to her bed and put my face into her nightie. The happy smell purrs in my head.

I hear Nan's shoes crying on the stairs, so I run back to our room.

'Well!'

Nan huffs the Well out on the air.

'Can't turn one's back a second. I'll just have to do your hair again. What have you been up to? I don't know, I'm sure. Where did that comb go? Things walk. Ah! Now how did it get down there? Oo, I've a bone in my leg. Old age creeping on . . . better blow your nose again, just for safety. Did you do fafes when I asked you? Better run and do it again, to make sure. I'll pull.'

'I don't want to. I did it. Really and truly.'

Nan's talking is full of chuckles. When we go down the road to Aunt Patsy's house, it dances all the way. I hold the present for Anne. I wish it was Teddy.

I listen to the footsteps. Mine hardly sound at all. Nan's go click-clock, click-clock, very busy and biscuity. Sometimes the shoes have to clear their throats, then they go on, clocki-clock. All the shoes are talking to each other. Some of them shout important things all the way down the road. Under Nanny's voice saying about the Johnsons there are shoes saying 'Horrid old Spider', and 'Eat up Nicely', and 'Hurry up Slow-coach', and 'Bags I the Bathroom' – such a hullabaloo, all talking at once, no manners, but nobody says anything.

A pity my shoes are so young. If I stamp them to grow them up, they say Ouch Ouch, and Nanny says 'Walk properly, now.' When I'm tall like the others, my shoes will tell me tall secrets. Then all the other shoes in the street will be cross. Do you know who learnt me about the shoes? It was my pussy, Fizz. His ears jump in front when he hears shoes, and he listens with all his fur. Then he licks his paws quick, and sits down to think about it.

We turn the corner. I can see the hurdy-gurdy man. I start to cry. There is a monkey on top. It has too many hands.

'Come along, now. Don't dawdle. Shut your eyes and I'll tell you when we've passed it.'

Nanny rings Aunt Patsy's bell.

'Don't forget to thank them for having you, and wipe your mouth after tea, oh and give Anne her present straight away –'

The door opens. A horrid fierce roar leaps out at us.

'Come in,' Maureen says, 'we're playing Oranges and Lemons. Super fun.'

She's very clean. I think I'll go home now. But Nanny smiles and goes away. Now there's only parcel.

'Shall I take that? It's for Anne, I suppose. Lucky cat. My birthday's too near Christmas to be much good.'

I hold on tight to parcel.

'Well, come upstairs and take your coat off.'

But it doesn't feel safe. Another roar rushes out. I think I'll stay here until Nanny comes back. If she does.

'Oh lord,' Maureen says, 'I told Mummy what would happen if we asked babies. Wait here and I'll fetch her.'

Aunt Patsy comes, pushing along a funny smell. She's all dressed up

and not like Aunt Patsy. If I don't talk perhaps they'll go away and leave me alone.

'Aren't you pretty?'

Aunt Patsy lifts me up and shakes me. She carries me upstairs and into a bedroom. It doesn't smell like any of ours. She takes off my cloak and says what a sweet dress, was it made? Anne comes in.

'Hullo Clare, Maureen says you've got a present for me. May I have it?'

I hold on to parcel, and don't speak.

'Never mind now,' Aunt Patsy says, 'we're feeling a little strange.'

'Well it's my present. I call it a rotten swiz.'

We go downstairs, but all of a sudden Anne snaps parcel away and runs off laughing.

'It rattles! Bet I can guess what! Only hope it isn't one I've already got.'

Anne is at the bottom of the stairs. It takes me a long time, holding on, because I don't reach up far enough. Parcel has gone. I have grown even smaller. Then I feel the ribbons. I hold on tight to Pig and Sand.

Aunt Patsy opens a door and we go in. There are lots of big children, all everywhere. They are roaring and have too many arms. Their mouths are huge. I think they are going to be sick.

'Come along, dear.'

Aunt Patsy pulls me along. I should like to be at home.

'We're having such fun. It's Musical Chairs. Wouldn't you like to join in?'

There is a bang. A chair has fallen down. They're all stamping and shouting, and pushing. Their shoes are saying Ouch, but they don't care. They're horrid. They have too many hands.

'Well, stand here and watch. We *are* rather exicited, being Musical Chairs.'

I watch the huge monkeys. A pressing starts in my tummy. Why doesn't Nanny come? I always say, 'I want fafes, Nan,' and she knows.

'Come on, Clare,' says Maureen, 'we're going to play Hunt the Slipper. You can play that. It's potty. I'll show you.'

The monkeys sit down, but they go on pushing and making sick noises.

'Fafes.'

'What?' Maureen says. 'Oh well, you watch us for a bit.'

The monkeys are throwing a shoe at each other. Why did Maureen go away? I said fafes. She didn't care. My tummy is pressing. The monkeys throw the shoe. They are pulling it and hitting it. Poor shoe. It will die. My tummy is trying to push out the water. I hold on to Pig and Sand. The monkeys throw poor shoe up in the air. It falls on my feet I pick it up quick, and hug it.

'All better now. Don't cry. There's nothing to be afraid of. Only a silly old dream.'

The monkeys are shouting:

'Chuck it back! Hurry up! Oh, do buck up!'

I kiss the shoe better.

They all get up. They come at me. Lots of legs and arms and mouths all muddled up, and roaring. They get closer. They grow and grow. They fill up the space. Why doesn't Nanny come?

And then my doorway bangs open. I try and shut it with my hand, but it won't. There's warmness. There's wet everywhere. It goes down my legs and on the floor.

I think I am on fire with sadness.

'Don't cry. It doesn't matter. It's all right . . .'

But I look at the pool on the floor, and my inside has turned into monkeys.

## II. JAMSPOONS

When I wake up in the morning, first of all I remember that I'm me, and I'm seven-and-a-quarter. I'm taller than Beryl, who is eight. I watch the dusts dancing in the sunbeam which comes through the parting in the curtains, and I wonder if there are dusts only in the sunbeam, because they like it, and all the specks in the room go there. There are all sorts of things in the flowers on the curtains, but you can't explain them. When you have measles, you see faces in the wallpaper, and one of them has half a nose. Sometimes, when you wake up in the middle of the night, you see a monkey sitting on top of the curtain rail, but Malcolm, who is three-and-a-bit, says it isn't a monkey at all.

It is a Trumtroo, which comes at night and is very black with red eyes. If he calls Nanny, she wakes up and says: 'Go away, you nasty old Trumtroo,' but it sounds funny without her teeth in. Cokers are nice animals, Malcolm says. They slide up his bed and are furry with large smiles. They make friendly squeaks, but Trumtroos growl . . . Nanny gets out of bed, scratches her head with her face screwed up like 'Oo', and she dresses under her nightie. I watch very carefully, so that when I'm grown-up I'll be able to do it too. You can't, with pyjamas. She picks up her corsets from the chair and whisks them under the nightie. Now you can't see anything at all, except a billowing and a tinkle-tinkle-tinkle, until the suspenders are done up. Sometimes the nightie gets caught up, and you can see Nanny's beautiful wiggly veins on her legs. I shall have them too, when I'm grown-up. You can hear the clicks of the hooks, like knocking your teeth together, and then the snappy noise of elastic. Suddenly Nanny shakes herself, and Foof! the nightie floats to the floor. She steps out of it, almost dressed, like magic.

Malcolm gets into my bed, which is a treat. He has been in Nanny's bed, which makes two treats. We play the game where we swing backwards and forwards side by side, saying a poem out of one of the Christmas books, in a jogging voice. Mummy thinks its a funny game, but really we're going somewhere. Then I draw a picture on Malcolm's forehead with my finger, and he shuts his eyes and guesses what it is. Then he draws one on mine, but it is nearly always a Coker or a Trumtroo, so I never know. I don't tell him it isn't fair, because he's only three-and-a-bit . . . Nanny walks right through the sunbeam, and when she is out the other side, the dusts are muddled up. Sometimes she talks in her sleep, and it sounds like fur. Once she said: 'Look out! The pearls are dropping.' I told her in the morning, then I told Mummy, and I said it over and over again to myself, 'The pearls are dropping, the pearls are dropping,' until it was all in one smear and the words made a picture . . . Malcolm goes out, slish-slosh in his slippers, and he gets into Mummy's bed. Today is Wednesday, and that means Sheila's piano lesson. Sheila is ten. Wednesday is yellow, and in the middle. Saturday and Sunday are on a higher part, but it's different when you learn it in French. Mercredi is fishy, and Dimanche is squashy, and Jeudi is like a hot bath, an inch-by-inch one, when you hunch your knees and put

them down very slowly, so that the water creeps up like cats' tongues only softer, and the island gets smaller and smaller, but you mustn't let it split into two. The days go upwards, but the alphabet and numbers go across. What was there in those places when I was too little to know the letters and numbers?

If I screw up my eyes I can see colours round the edges of things, but I can't do it when grown-ups are there or they say, 'Don't make those awful faces,' and Nanny says the wind will change . . . If you part your porridge in the middle like hair, the milk curls in from the sides and fills it up, then you can float a crumb. Malcolm has Bemax on bread for breakfast, and just as he is biting it, Sheila and I lean forward and look at him, and he laughs. The Bemax flies off in a cloud all over the table. 'You're not to make him laugh,' says Nanny, but she is nearly smiling too. She reads her letter, and when her eyes get to the end of a line, her head jerks back to the start of the next one, and goes slowly along again. 'I'm cross,' she says, 'my sister May has had another girl. That makes four. Whose turn is it to lick the jamspoon?' 'My turn,' says Sheila quickly. I say: 'Scuse *me,* but it's *my* turn. You know jolly well it is.' 'Jolly well isn't,' Sheila says. 'Jolly well is,' I say, and we go on shouting ''Tis,' ''Tisn't,' ''Tis,' ''Tisn't,' until Malcolm starts banging with his feet under the table and squealing with his mouth full. The Bemax comes out in puffs, and he won't stop. Nanny says: 'Sheila, you're really getting too old to lick jamspoons, let alone make all this fuss. You ought to be ashamed. You're the eldest.' Sheila looks fierce, and says: 'All right. I don't care about silly old jamspoons. It's babyish.' I feel very sorry for her, and it's queer: there is no fun in the jamspoon now, and it just tastes like jam on a spoon! Sheila must be very good. Giving up jamspoons! Goodness! I go and tell Mummy, then Daddy, who makes his surprised face, with his eyes and mouth opened very wide. I tell cook and the maid who has too much water in her mouth so that it bubbles in the cracks. If I had too much water in mine, I'd keep spitting it out in plops. They say Oh, and Good Gracious Me, and Did You Ever, Now. But they don't see the bigness of it.

Malcolm sits in front of the gasfire on his pottie. He stands up to see the red round on his behind, but it hasn't got there yet. I read my books and smell the pages. They all have different smells.

We take Sheila to her piano lesson Her face is like a picture on the wall, but I think she must want to cry and it won't, so it's just an ache in her throat and a stiffness behind her eyes. If only one tear rolls down, you have to press another out of the other eye, to make it equal.

I watch for the squares on the wall which say 'Ft in', and then you are getting near a giant biscuit on the pavement which Nanny calls a fire hydrant. I step in the middle every time or else something will happen. I look at the horses dragging carts along. They have frilly ankles and their heads nod all the time. Their necks must get tired. I watch the dogs whose tails curl right over and tap their backs. They are called Touchtails. The nicest ones have coatpocket ears which flap all the while their legs are jogging.

Nanny stops to talk to people and I say loudly, because it's important: 'Sheila's given up licking jamspoons.' But they smile like mist and Nanny whispers: 'Don't interrupt. It's rude.' Malcolm shuffles along being a train, 'Ch-ch-ch.' We kick a stone along, but it goes into the gutter and the other stones aren't the same.

Nanny buys bitter aloes and the chemist with no chin says: 'Does the little boy bite his nails?' 'No', says Nanny, 'it's the eldest.' They both look shocked at Sheila and she stares straight at the cough lozenges, very fierce. She drags me further up the road, and says, slow and unjoined: 'You look at horses' behinds and think rude things. I shall tell Mummy if you're not careful.' I don't understand, but she must be right, because she's given up licking jamspoons. I feel bulgy inside. Perhaps I'm going to be sick. I try and decide, but there's too much noise.

Miss Brownley opens the door and Sheila stands beside her, staring at me with iron eyes, to make me shy. Miss Brownley tells me I've grown, but I only look up as far as her chest, or Sheila will pinch me later on.

We go home and Malcolm runs his fingers along the railings. He sings: 'Plink plonk, plonk plink.' I sing: 'Plinkety plonk, plonkety plink. Isn't it fun, Nanny?' 'Yes, but you'll wear out your gloves.'

Animal biscuits for tea, and Malcolm eats the tails first, then the legs. I eat round and round making it smaller each time. Sheila eats properly. Malcolm spills his milk and Nanny puts a saucer under the table-cloth

where the wet is. 'Clumsy, careless,' she says, but she isn't angry because she's reading her *Nursery World*. I unwind my swiss-roll and make it a circle. 'Whose turn is it to lick the jamspoon?' Malcolm stretches out a hand dotted with crumbs like bristles. He leans his tongue out and licks. Then he sucks with swooshing noises. He chatters his teeth on the spoon and wags his head from side to side, making the spoon swing. I make my eyes see in a woolly way, and look at him. His mouth and nose join up, and his eyes melt and the spoon goes wavy. He sighs when Nanny takes it away. It didn't taste like that for me. Sheila must have put a magic on it.

Sheila is staring at me without blinking. She chews slowly and stares slowly. There seems to be a brick in my tummy. Suddenly her eyes crease into slits and she laughs. She's getting old. She doesn't want to lick jamspoons any more.

# The Picnic

by Diana Gardner

The morning of the picnic was, as Marigold had known it would be, enchanted; everything was, to her mind, as it must have looked on the day the world was made: filled with bright green, stationary leaves beginning to uncurl, and the sunlight making the dew-drenched gravel in front of the square, white country house shine as if diamonds were mixed among the stones. No one had, as yet, been out of doors.

Three hours later, at half-past ten, the car – their father had said that they could use if for the picnic, and that he would use the carriage – would come round to fetch them. It would be driven by Hurn, in a fawn dust coat, who later would take them, herself, Fenella and Miss Brock, out beyond the Roman earthworks and through the downy countryside to Clumber Woods, where they would meet the Hoskins family in their big, royal-blue Minerva.

Marigold ran out on to the bright, wet lawn. Spot, the fox-terrier – he had a tan patch over one eye which made him look like a clown: all he needed was a ham ruffle round his neck – jumped and barked round her feet. He, too, was to to on the picnic.

In the sunfilled dining-room – Mrs. Christie had pulled down the buff, canvas blinds: how hot for spring! – the family started breakfast. Marigold was very sorry that her mother was not coming with them on the picnic. She usually did, but not to-day – this was to be Miss Brock's day, she said. Next month, Miss Brock was to take up a new post as governess to the children of the Governor of Gibraltar. To-day was Miss Brock's day – and Fenella's. And hers, Marigold's.

Marigold ate her toast, spread thickly with shining homemade marmalade – it was cool and sweet and runny – thinking of the wonderful day ahead. Would there be sandwiches made with the cucumbers from the greenhouses in the walled garden? Or was it too early for them? But so many delicious things were brought forward early, to be eaten at spring picnics. And there would be 'splits' and saffron cakes, and éclairs.

The sunlight deepened. The gravel in front of the house grew quite hot. A maid came out and pulled a striped blind across the thick black paint of the front door. Nothing was left to chance, or allowed to blister, in the Christie establishment. The house was white and black, and surrounded by long immaculate beds of scarlet geraniums, and at the end of each lawn a tiny white railing ran, beyond which were chestnut groves of a pure and impenetrable green.

The high, cream-coloured touring-car came round, and while Hurn strapped the picnic basket to the grid, Marigold climbed in and waited. In a few minutes Miss Brock came out, with Fenella, Marigold held her breath when she saw Fenella. She always did when she saw her dressed like this, ready to go out. Had any little girl a sister who was lovelier? Fenella was wearing a soft white muslin frock, pricked with tiny black velvet spots, and a wide, black straw hat which made her narrow face paler and lovelier than ever. Fenella even had violet eyes. As Fenella climbed into the car and sat down beside her against the thickly padded, bottle-green upholstery, Marigold saw that she had a new sunshade – of white silk, with a frill below the handle. Marigold snuggled against her. She had adored her elder sister ever since she had ridden in her perambu-

lator – high, like the car – and Fenella, then fourteen, had walked quietly along beside it.

For Fenella had always been kind to her. Their examples were good: their father was considerate to their mother, and their mother was polite to her servants. Marigold's home was a serene place, personified for her by Fenella.

Miss Brock, their governess, was also extremely pleasant – perhaps much of the credit for Fenella's charm should go also to her – and the two girls loved her. But in a month's time, she was leaving them! Nevertheless, they were not over-sad about it because she was going to a pleasant family in an interesting place, and in any case, it had to be, because next term, Marigold was going to a boarding-school.

They were all now in the car, with Spot, excited, running across their feet in the well at the back. Hurn started the engine and climbed into the 'bucket' seat, slipping the car into gear – the lever was outside – and driving slowly away down the yellow drive, between the low, white railings on the edges of the lawns, and out into the bright country road. As they came out from among the trees by their gate, it was really quite hot, and Fenella put up her parasol. The car was not to be driven too fast for this to be practicable until they had got well beyond the little market town two miles away.

Fenella was looking slowly from side to side, her small, pretty mouth lifted slightly at each corner. Marigold thought that in this pensive, happily observing mood of hers, Fenella was at her prettiest. Her hands were white and small. In one, she held, limply, a pair of long, black gloves. Marigold kept taking her eyes off the countryside in order to look at her. Miss Brock was in the front, beside Hurn. Later, Spot wriggled himself through the space between the bucket seats, so that he could sit in her lap. No one spoke.

Fenella was thinking of Roderick Hoskins who, with his mother and brothers and sisters, was to be at the picnic at Clumber Woods. She had not seen him since this time last year, just before he went to West Africa. Ever since, she had been living for this day.

Beyond the town they turned off the highway and spun quietly, scarcely using the engine, along a narrow, white road between hedges snowy with hawthorn, down a long hill. The dust thrown up by the

narrow tyres would have bewildered anyone behind them, but the road was empty.

They went faster now, and it was cooler. Fenella had put away her parasol. She looked at Marigold and gave her a slow, sweet smile. Marigold thought, for the fifth time that morning, that there was no one so lovely as Fenella, in the whole world.

At noon, they reached Clumber, a narrow village built against a narrow, straight street, on a hill surmounted by the ruins of a castle. They drew up outside the Lalland Arms, so that Hurn could water the car: he fancied it might be running hot, although in fact, it was not. A few minutes later, they had crested the hill, passed under the castle mound, and were slipping away down the other side, into the heart of oak woods.

They could now see, at the appointed place, the Hoskins's great blue tourer. Mrs. Hoskins was sitting on a red check travelling rug spread out on the close-cropped turf. Their chauffeur was standing a little way off down the lane, smoking a cigarette. The four younger children, and their eldest son, Roderick, were already in the woods playing at hide-and-seek. Marigold could hear calls and laughter from amid the trees.

'Hello, my dear girls,' said Mrs. Hoskins, in her strong, almost masculine voice, and laying down her Mudie novel. Her thick eyebrows met above her long nose. In colouring, she was the exact opposite from the two almost albino Christie girls, who were now climbing out of their car. She was dressed in a dark brown travelling coat, a collar and tie, and a straw 'boater' pitched forward on her mass of piled-up, thick hair. One could see instantly from where her son, Roderick, inherited his dark, brilliantly good looks. She smiled, showing strong, white teeth, and, without getting up, stretched out her hands towards the girls.

'And how's your mother?' she asked Fenella. She and Mrs. Christie had been at school together. 'I'm sorry she couldn't come. It would have done her good.'

Marigold watched her, while she talked with Fenella and Miss Brock. Marigold did not know what she thought about Mrs. Hoskins. She did not feel at ease in such a powerful presence.

Finally Mrs. Hoskins rose to her feet and began to take charge. 'We'll feed now,' she said to Miss Brock. 'We've all come a long way, and I,

for one, am famished. Afterwards, we can read, or sleep, while the younger ones go in the woods.'

Roderick Hoskins now came slowly out from among the trees, dividing the high bracken with his strong, brown hands. Although he had been chasing his younger brothers and sisters in and out of the woods, he did not look hot. In fact, in his black blazer and white flannels he was cool-looking, neat.

'I'm sorry I was "missing" when you arrived', he said.

He spoke with a slight drawl.

Marigold thought that he was bigger than when she had last seen him: his shoulders and jaw were thicker. One of his younger brothers now came and stood near him, and he placed a broad hand on his curly black head. It made her think suddenly of hearing her mother tell Miss Brock that Roderick Hoskins had been shooting big game in Africa. So that hand must have held a rifle! Looking at it, she felt slightly afraid. He looked intently, piercingly, at Fenella. Marigold felt that the air had become suddenly electrically charged.

But then he suddenly dropped his dark eyes, and looked quickly away. Marigold was startled. This was unlike him. Generally, he looked boldly, unflinchingly. It seemed to make everyone feel awkward.

Mrs. Hoskins, Miss Brock and Fenella then spread out a white cloth and opened the luncheon baskets. Everyone took their places, sitting, on the ground. The two chauffeurs, with their own hampers, sat down some way off, in a clearing. A cuckoo began then to call from one of the larger trees in the centre of the wood. It was still very hot, almost unnaturally hot, for spring.

During lunch there was much laughter, the loudest and heartiest seeming to come from Mrs. Hoskins, augmented by that of her four younger children: two boys and two girls. Although Marigold sat amongst them she was still not too far from Fenella, and occasionally, she looked at her – the shadows in Fenella's white muslin lap were greenish, from the leaves of the surrounding trees – and suddenly she was shocked to realise that underneath Fenella's vivacity, and the bright sallies which she exchanged with Mrs. Hoskins, she was, in some way, not now so happy as she had been when they had set out. But whatever could have happened? Marigold asked herself. No; no; she thought.

Dearest Fenella – don't be unhappy; not on this wonderful day. And then she noticed that Roderick – sitting not far away from Fenella – was eating his cucumber sandwich with his back half turned against her.

Last year, Fenella had known Roderick well. They had met at the parties and dances given in the comfortable, small country houses in the district, and during the few months before he had gone to Africa, he had come frequently to the Christies'. Fenella had been just twenty, and unusually, openly happy whenever Roderick had been near. Marigold had, in the end, thought of them as a pair – as she did her father and mother. They also looked very striking together: Roderick so dark and brown-skinned, and Fenella so fair.

Roderick now lopped a ball at Spot, who ran and retrieved it again and again, tirelessly, always coming back for it, so that it could be thrown again. He seemed less talkative than a year ago. In some subtle way, he seemed to have changed.

Was it this which was making Fenella unhappy?

Marigold then remembered that she had overhead another remark: Cook saying to a housemaid: 'Africa'll ruin young Mr. Hoskins. It's still a raw country, and there'll be no check on him out there'. The words came now ominously to her mind. Why? Why would Africa ruin him? What had Cook meant?

After lunch, Fenella and Roderick and Marigold walked into the woods, through the cooler glades: the medallions and circles of sunlight striking through the leaves above them, and mottling their light-coloured clothes. It was Mrs. Hoskins who had suggested that they went there; at the same time telling the four younger children not to go, but to rest for half an hour. She herself wanted a nap. Miss Brock was resting on one elbow, looking at Mrs. Hoskins's *Manual for Rose-Growers*. Mrs. Hoskins had wanted Roderick and Fenella to go for a walk together, and there could be no better chaperone than the almost white-haired child, Marigold – the doting younger sister who would never leave them, and yet would not stop them from talking. Mrs. Hoskins hoped that her son would hurry up and ask Fenella Christie to marry him. She wanted him to settle down, and it would be an excellent match. Fenella was charming – like her mother at the same age, and Mrs. Christie had worn well. But Ella Hoskins was, in the quietness following the picnic,

deeply anxious. Roddy was different since coming back from Africa. Some change seemed to have come to him. Last year, the marriage had been practically certain – Fenella's pale beauty seemed to have spell-bound and transfixed him: all that last spring he had done nothing else except talk about her – but it seemed now that this was changed. He appeared clouded, anxious in some way. When he had heard about this picnic, and that Fenella was to be there, he had even tried to get out of it. Why?

He gave no explanation.

Ella Hoskins sighed deeply, as she laid her novel on one side, and lay back among her striped cushions on the plaid rug. She was worried. What had happened to this eldest child of hers, in Africa? Had her husband's and her fears that his passionate, rather wayward nature might land him in trouble, actually come about? Had he done something that he was ashamed of and which now made him feel unable to seek out, and to ask for, Fenella? But what could he have done to bring this about? What could he have considered bad enough? It was unlikely that he had swindled anyone – he was at least straight over things like that. But had he become suddenly violent, and injured someone? He was headstrong. Yet even this, she felt, did not seem right, did not seem to be the answer. She then suddenly thought of black women – negresses, their sensual, shining beauty rising into her mind. She saw them linked with her son's outstanding handsomeness. Had he – at first, she recoiled, but then she faced it squarely – gone to bed with them? Had he been doing that in Africa? Oh, heavens, no! she almost said aloud. Not that! Or it would spoil him forever for wanting the pale Christie girl. She felt that she had gone quite white, although she gave no other sign of her thoughts which Miss Brook or the children, if they had been looking at her, would have noticed. No, not that. She took up her book again, her thoughts changing, coming again under control. Perhaps the simple truth of the matter was that he had grown tired of Fenella while he had been away, and did not know how to say it nicely. Perhaps that was all. Her heart was knocking still, however.

Roderick and Fenella, with Marigold, walked now deeper into the woods. They had now reached a clearing where a dead jay hung suspended: a warning to others. Marigold had felt like crying about it. She

had hung back a little so that the others would not see how upset she was, while Roderick and Fenella walked slowly on. When afterwards she caught up with them it appeared that they were arguing together – intensely, urgently; and this was unlike Fenella. Her sister seemed very distressed. What had he just said to her? And why, on seeing how upset Fenella was, did he not try to make her happy again, to put things right? Marigold thought he looked pig-headed, sulky; his black brows – like his mothers's, and which, like hers, met above his long nose – seemed darker and thicker, and his full, red mouth was slightly twisted.

'I'm sorry you don't agree with me, that's all', he said, almost sullenly.

No, Marigold realised, he didn't want to be nice to Fenella. He switched at the bracken beside him with an ash stick that he had skinned white. Marigold then heard him say, angrily:

'No. I'm afraid I don't want to settle in England. I don't like it so much as you seem to. I think I prefer Africa.'

Fenella was shifting the fallen oak leaves with the tip of her parasol, and they had begun to walk slowly. She did not say anything then. It seemed that she did not know what to say.

Marigold thought: Why did not Roderick immediately say to Fenella, 'But will you come to Africa with me?' or something like that? Although she would dread to lose Fenella she knew that this was what he ought to say just then.

He looked like a guilty schoolboy who knew that he was being bad, but would do nothing to repair the damage. His head was bent low.

There was a long silence.

Marigold now heard, under a little hill in the heart of the wood, the gurgle of running water.

'Oh, listen,' she cried. 'There's a brook!'

She had forgotten for a moment the queer tension between Roderick and Fenella. Eagerly, she ran forward through the bracken which, here and there, was almost up to her shoulder. The other two followed in silence. They were all now trying to find the brook. Fenella's eyes were large and dark, and almost vacant-looking.

Seeing their set faces when they came out of the wood, Mrs. Hoskins knew instantly that Roderick had rejected Fenella. And she knew also that it was because he had done something that he felt ashamed of, and

that because of this, he was casting himself off. But the knowledge went almost as soon as it came. It horrified her too much to know that her son was in danger.

She took a deep breath, and her mind reached out, as before, for a simpler, more trivial explanation. Irritating! she told herself. But there is no accounting for tastes; and Roddy is old enough to know his own mind. Perhaps he's right. Perhaps Fenella is not the right one for him at all. And perhaps she is too compliant for theirs to have been a good match. She hoped, however, that the girl would not be too broken-hearted. She looked shattered.

Afterwards, they all played hide-and-seek. Even Miss Brock. Now and then, the two chauffeurs, who had been walking slowly up and down in the lane, smoking, smiled wryly at the shouts and catcalls from amid the woods. Marigold now thoroughly enjoyed herself: she loved each moment of this. She had, for the time being, forgotten her bewilderment about Fenella and Roderick.

But going home in the high car – it was colder now, and they had to have a rug over their knees: the two cars had parted company a little beyond Clumber village, the Hoskins going east through more woods, and the Christies north, on to higher ground – Fenella and Marigold and Miss Brock were silent, even Spot lay curled, tired out, on the rug at the girls' feet, and Marigold did not dare to look at Fenella, who was sitting so quietly beside her.

And anyway, the sweet, narrow face under the wide, black hat was turned away from her. How earnestly now, going back, Fenella looked at the passing view! Never once did she turn to look at Marigold or at Miss Brock. Nor did she look at the countryside on their side of the car. Marigold knew that Fenella was suffering, searingly, terribly. The slim body in the spotted white muslin frock was taut and still. Perhaps, with her face turned away, Fenella was crying, deeply, silently.

She knew, too, how Fenella looked when she cried: simple, tragic, without becoming disfigured or distorted. It was always as if she gave herself to sorrow, allowed it to take her right over.

But what had made this lovely day end like this, in this way? It must have been Roderick. For Fenella, he seemed to do everything wrong. And yet last year he had been the one who made her so happy!

Marigold did not understand any of it. In fact, she thought, she understood very little about nearly everything. Perhaps she was too young. But she supposed the others would know – Miss Brock, their mother, Cook. Although she, herself, might never know – and would certainly never be told – what had happened that day. And she would never be able to ask Fenella. Perhaps Roderick had told her that he did not want her. Had it been that that he had said, in the woods?

Marigold sat closer to her sister. Her fair head – Miss Brock had allowed her to take off her bonnet, and the wind was lifting her soft, almost white hair – rested lightly against Fenella's arm. This made Fenella turn her head – briefly, nervously; but Marigold did not look up. Marigold then pushed her small hand very slowly into Fenella's, where it lay among the muslin folds of her dress. For a moment, Fenella gripped it, tightly, almost ferociously. Marigold was then sure that Fenella was crying.

How peculiar it was, and sad, that Roderick had not wanted this lovely sister of hers.

# Results of a Shock

by Alfred Andersch*

'Are there people living on the other boats?' Franziska asked.

'No,' said O'Malley. 'We're quite alone here.'

She looked at the barometer in its gleaming brass housing. The needle pointed to fine weather. *Will the mist have lifted by tomorrow morning?' This morning,* she corrected herself. O'Malley had pinned a chart of the Lagoon to the wall with drawing pins, a strange jumble of sandbanks, currents, shallows, land, sea-marks, beacons and names. The silence grew deeper while she listened to the stranger's story, leaning against the wall of the cabin, her eyes fixed upon the chart, upon a web of mysteries.

© Alfred Andersch 1961. An extract from THE RED HEAD a novel to be published by William Heinemann Ltd.

## O'MALLEY'S STORY

It began with my falling through the night. The night whistled past me, the night from the third to the fourth of May, 1944; up above it was a clear, starry night, down below it was slightly hazy, as I observed when I bundled up the parachute on a patch of land on the edge of a wood near Hildesheim, after I had lain for a few seconds on the grass and moss following the impact. You don't soar, you hurtle down pretty fast, even after the parachute has opened; you hit the ground and for a moment you are stupefied, perhaps partly from the shock of jumping, of jumping through a hatch into a ten-thousand-foot abyss, and the seconds that follow the jump, the seconds before the parachute opens, during which the night whistles past you. I have had very few nightmares since then, because I have lived in reality through one of the oldest of man's nightmares.

Bear in mind that men do this voluntarily! In no army in the world are men forced to make parachute jumps; only volunteers do that. Those who volunteer imagine that they are acting from patriotism, from the wish to be heroes. But the situation in which they place themselves is far too fantastic to have anything in common with such simple feelings as patriotism and heroism. A man who leaps out of an aeroplane flying at a tremendous speed into an immeasurable abyss is a man who falls out of everything he has known, out of all such restricted things as a nation or an idea. He falls out of time and space. Just remember that when you hear that parachutists are very brave soldiers and very brutal torturers! Anyone who is capable of thus jumping into the void is capable of everything else, of any greatness, of any baseness. I am not saying this to excuse the very special baseness of which I was guilty.

Moreover, I didn't even jump 'in company' as the parachutists say, but all on my own. I wasn't a parachutist either; I was a member of the counter-espionage and wore a grey suit, a mackintosh and brown shoes, although at that time I was a lieutenant in the RAF. I had three flat packs of C rations and a few German ration cards and German money and brilliantly forged identity papers in my pockets, and an address in my head. It was the address of a man who operated a small transmitter for us between Hildesheim and Hanover. My mission was to find out about

a few small, very important and special industrial undertakings in the Hildesheim region, and when I had done so I was to go to the man with the transmitter, who would pass my information on to England. That was the situation. The mission was perfectly clear, even if not easy. I was also carrying staff maps of the district I was to reconnoitre. I knew exactly where I had landed.

I found a hollow under low fir trees, in the undergrowth, where I was able to hide the parachute, but there was no point in starting out in the middle of the night; a solitary man wandering along a country road in the second half of the night would have been far more conspicuous than the same man during the day; so I lay down on the parachute silk, waited for morning and thought over my situation. I am not one of those people who require 'a certain distance from events' in order to be clear in their own minds as to what has happened to them. The same instant something happens to me I begin to reflect upon the occurrence and its significance to me. For example, I'm perfectly clear as to why I am now sitting with you and telling you this story; why I took an interest in you, followed you and waited for you for hours in your hotel: I did it because I'm frightened and because, as I've already told you, I have an eye for people who don't belong, people who are themselves in such an extreme situation that one can, so to speak, deposit one's fear with them.

During that hour of night I observed that I was in a situation which was thoroughly characteristic of me. It was typical of me that I had jumped alone and in civilian clothes. I had been in a position to volunteer for special duty because I had studied German at Oxford. I had studied German from a desire to be able to converse completely fluently and faultlessly with my German mother. My German mother was a noble, dark-blonde, aesthetically delicate and completely faultless woman. Because my mother was as she was, I became as I am. You can read up all about the genesis of inclinations like mine in the psychoanalytical literature. My mother is dead, by the way; she died during the war, at the time when I was in a German POW camp for officers. But I'm anticipating. When the war broke out I was eighteen. It broke out at precisely the moment when I had become absolutely certain that I wasn't normal. Because I wasn't normal I learnt German and because at that time, at the end of puberty, I felt chosen and outcast, I volunteered

for the Counter-Intelligence Corps. I didn't want to be thrown in among the great heap of normal men. I laugh at people who deny the law of cause and effect. My fate is the outcome of an unbroken, automatic chain of cause and effect.

So I became engaged in an activity that lay waiting for individualists, for the isolated; but curiously I never took to the most extreme aspect of the service for which I had volunteered: I mean parachute jumping. I had been trained for it, but every time I jumped I had to take pep pills beforehand, in order to feel up to it. That night, too, I had taken pills, and as a result I lay wide awake on the parachute silk in the undergrowth, waiting for dawn in a condition between stupefaction and intense excitement. Before leaving there, I forced myself with the aid of a few cigarettes to a state of calm that was no calm.

I found the road to Hildesheim very quickly and after a while a sign saying it was another five miles to the town. After about a couple of miles I came to a village that was really no longer a village, but an industrial housing estate. The housing estate and the factory belonging to it had been attacked during the night, before I jumped, by an American bomber squadron – as a matter of fact, I had seen a number of fires in the district before I jumped. A third of the estate had been destroyed; the whole population was out in the streets round the burning or smouldering buildings; I attracted no attention in the tumult, or at least I thought I attracted no attention, I actually remember helping to sort out furniture and all kinds of household utensils in front of a house from whose burning interior they were being carried by a few men. I walked on and came to a big concrete barracks, or rather what was left of it, ambulances were drawing up outside it, I heard loud wails from the basement, I went in and climbed over concrete debris down a few steps into the basement, in which lay a long row of dead women workers, while their workmates who had survived them knelt beside them lamenting or praying in a foreign language. As I gathered from the speech of the women who stood in distress by the dead, they were Russians, slave workers who had been employed in the factory; those who had been killed by our bombs would not have to work any more; twenty to thirty of them, all young women, lay motionless in a long row on the basement floor; blankets had been thrown over them and

their faces stared grey and pallid, with eyes still open, at the bare ceiling.

I left the basement and the village, the weather was very fine, a radiant morning in May that was in unbearable contrast to the grey faces of the dead women; my agitation returned, I took this experience as a bad omen. Remember, I had spent most of the war in a secret, very secluded Intelligence Service training centre; I had seen little of the air raids in Britain; I wasn't naive, but all the time I was training I had visualized the task I should one day be called upon to perform as an adventure; now it turned out at the very beginning that it was not an adventure but something terribly senseless. I wasn't prepared for that.

After an hour's march I reached the town of Hildesheim. Do you know Hildesheim? It's a pretty, neat, not very large town. I passed through suburbs of detached houses in little gardens and then came to interconnecting streets lined with larger buildings; I took my time, I studied the shop windows, in which there was not much to be seen. Although they bore a close resemblance to shop windows in wartime Britain, everything looked to me very foreign; I was in a foreign country and I walked more and more slowly; I began to saunter in order to enter into the foreign atmosphere; I told myself I must melt into it in order not to be conspicuous; suddenly I caught myself thinking that I must become almost a German if I was to be successful in carrying out the task entrusted to me. In particular, it was the sight of the people in the street that gave me such thoughts. Women were queueing up outside the shops and in my overwrought state I couldn't shake off the idea that they would soon be lying dead on basement floors, one behind the other, just as they were standing now. I had seen for myself that this was possible. Finally I penetrated into Hildesheim's medieval heart. Here I found a house resembling the timbered buildings of English country towns, but it was much bigger; there was nothing small, idyllically pretty or homely about this building; it was a really large house, beautifully proportioned; the main body of the house and the gables made up an artistic composition of black beams and whitewashed brick wall; the beams were decoratively carved and painted, the weather of centuries had worked upon them, they had become dark and rich; the house was a magnificent testimony to the spirit of medieval Germany, heavy, dignified and imaginative; in a shop window next door hung postcards

on which I read the name of the house; it was called the Knochenhauer-Amtshaus, 'Bone-Beaters' Hall'; I stepped back into the square and looked at it, I leant against the fountain in front of the house and wondered why such an immaculate house should bear such a repulsive name. Was Knochenhauer the name of a man who built it? Or had it been the house of some guild of craftsmen, a guild of butchers or torturers? The name suddenly lay like a spot upon the house, but while I was still meditating upon the contradiction between the house and its name, two men in civilian clothes came and arrested me.

Obviously my stop in the burning village had settled my hash. I had exchanged a few words with people, and one of them must have spotted my English accent. You can still hear it today, I'm sure. It had been responsible for the prolonged hesitation about dropping me in Germany; on account of it, I was several times nearly transferred to the fighting forces, to the great mass; I had to exercise a good deal of diplomacy in order to remain with Counter-Intelligence and finally get sent on this mission; from a military point of view it was irresponsible to give way to my insistence, but of course I have no right to reproach my superiors. As was confirmed by Inspector Kramer, whom I have to thank for the fact that I am still living – and what a life I'm living! – some person unknown had rung up the Gestapo headquarters in Hildesheim from the village and suggested they should take an interest in me. Kramer also told me that most denunciations they received at that time were anonymous. He was completely cynical on this point. In a total dictatorship in imminent danger of collapse, he said, the population lives in a state of unconscious divided conscience. It was one of the tasks of a total dictatorship to keep this split fixated in the subconscious.

At first, of course, I was a dead man when they arrested me in front of the Knochenhauer-Amtshaus. It was clear that according to all the rules of international law I should be shot. Before preparations were made for carrying out the verdict, however, I was interrogated and, since I refused to speak, tortured. I had been prepared for that. I found the method of torture primitive. Fundamentally it consisted in nothing but beating. They beat me with their fists, with sticks and with heavy whips. If you don't break down at the first shock, you quickly reach a limit at which you become insensitive; pain reaches such a level of intensity that

the body is no longer capable of registering it. The German method of torture isn't cold enough, it isn't truly sadistic; it is merely the expression of a dull rage that is out to smash the bones and the internal organs; fundamentally all they want to do is to kill the enemy. Sadism is something different; to the sadist torture is an end in itself, an art, a subtle form of enjoyment; at the end of the sadistic act there is almost always sexual gratification, the victim is loved before he is killed. Stop your ears, if you can't bear such revelations! I don't mean by this that my torturers didn't enjoy torturing me. But they weren't intelligent enough to see the victim in me: they only saw me as the enemy. There was nothing in them but the terrible automatism of hypnosis, hypnosis resulting from the ideology which they obeyed and under the influence of which they were unable to perceive anything but the enemy to be destroyed. Because they were so stupid, I withstood them.

When they had finished with me, Inspector Kramer came along. He had barely spoken to me for five minutes when I began to realize how absurd it was to lie in a blood-spattered cellar and let myself be tortured. Kramer was a tall, full-blooded man with white-blond hair, his eyebrows and the skin of his face were also white; he was intelligent and cynical and full of blood. Because life is as it is, nowadays I hate it. But at that time Kramer made it clear to me in a few conversations that it was stupid of me to resist life; less through what he said than through the manner of his existence, I felt how worth while it would be to stay alive. Kramer appealed to my intelligence; and I have never been able to resist seduction by this argument – at least I couldn't in those days. Not until right at the end, when he had gained his objective, did he drop the mask for a moment; he leaned back in his chair and his white-skinned face and his colourless eyes under white-blond brows assumed a hard, triumphant expression. I have never seen anything so remarkable, so paradoxical: a face that relaxed by going hard. When he removed the mask of life, which he had held up to me, I caught sight of the iron construction of an appliance, an automatic machine, into which I had put a penny piece to make it work. He didn't even grin. He merely looked at me metallically, while I reached for the shabby packet of life he had spat out with a rattling noise for my penny.

He made me undertake to act as undercover man for the Gestapo. I

was put in an officers' POW camp, from which I was to give information. I immediately asked for a private interview with the senior officer in the camp, a Colonel Wilcox, and revealed my position to him. He wasn't very pleased about it, but under the circumstances he couldn't refuse me his aid. He and a small group of British and United States officers supplied me with semi-credible information that enabled me to give the appearance of discharging my duties. My comrades finally got such a kick out of the situation that they twice organized fake escape attempts, which I was then able to 'betray'. Of course, I shouldn't have got away with it if the war had gone on much longer. After our return home, Colonel Wilcox went with me to my headquarters to clear me of suspicion. My superior officer, Major Roberts, thanked him for his statement. When I was about to leave the room with Wilcox, he asked me to stay behind for a moment. 'O'Malley,' he said, after the door had shut behind Wilcox, 'there is one point you may be able to clear up.'

I said, 'Yes, sir?' and looked at him enquiringly, although I knew exactly what was coming now.

'This transmitter you were to report to when you had collected your information . . .' I can still see Major Roberts sitting in front of me, iron-grey and cool, as he paused, put down his pipe and finally went on: 'This transmitter fell silent a week after you jumped. The man who operated it was shot by the Germans on May 12th. A week after you jumped. Is there anything you can tell me about that?'

I remember exactly how Roberts avoided looking at me as he put this question. I knew there would be no sense in describing what had happened to me that day, after I jumped, about the sight of the dead Russian girls, about the Knochenhauer-Amtshaus, later about the torture and Kramer's face, on which the mask of life was like a mollusc concealing a stone, to which I fell victim, about all the imponderables which had not been included in the reckoning of this mission and which I had soaked up like blotting paper, because my nature impels me to feel imponderables. Once more and for the last time, Franziska: I'm not saying this as an excuse for myself, although you may be trying to understand me, whereas in Roberts's case there was no question of any such attempt. He simply gazed out of the window into the blue-grey of evening in a London street. He didn't look at me, because as far as he

was concerned his question was pure routine. He knew the true answer to his question just as well as I did. But he also knew as well as I did the rules of the society in which we lived, the laws of English society, according to which I should not have regained my character as a gentleman if I had answered with the truth. In this respect Major Roberts had far less power than Inspector Kramer. Inspector Kramer could give me back my life for a penn'orth of information, whereas Roberts couldn't even give me back my honour for the treasure of confession. I come from Ireland, from a Catholic family, so I know that you can confess a crime and afterwards become a Christian again. But there is no hope of becoming a gentleman again after a betrayal. Not even death dissolves this ban. It therefore didn't matter what reply I gave to Roberts's question, so I said: 'No, sir, I can tell you nothing about it.'

'Right,' he said. 'The Gestapo records have nothing to say on the subject either.' He neither raised nor lowered his voice as he went on: 'You will receive your discharge papers tomorrow. You may go.'

He remained seated as I left, he didn't utter my name again, he didn't shake hands with me. Six months later I left England and I have never set foot there again.

***

O'Malley had told his story slowly, not hesitantly, but slowly, often with long pauses between his sentences. Once or twice Franziska had interrupted him, for instance when he spoke of his mother. She asked him how he knew that his mother was 'completely faultless'. 'How did she react,' she enquired, 'when she noticed that you weren't interested in girls?' – 'Naturally she refused to notice it at all,' he replied. 'My mother simply didn't speak of such things.'

'And you call that faultless?' Franziska had answered.

In the end, however, she had let him speak and simply listened, while still gazing at the chart of the lagoon. *'I'm fully awake, I've rarely been so wide awake, the coffee, but also the whisky, is keeping me awake, hard drinks always keep me awake. That was an old story, a story of shoals and shallows, of hidden sea-marks and extinguished beacons. They put us in boats, they slip charts into our hands, they even teach us a little navigation but then night falls, then the mist comes down, the sea-marks disappear, the beacons go out, and we are left alone in a world of shifting sands, of shallows and cur-*

*rents, a world we don't know, made up of unknown names. The world is a lagoon. He said he was afraid. It is because he is afraid that he has told me this old story.'*

'Why are you afraid?' she asked. 'It all happened so long ago. Thirteen years ago. Are you tormented by the thought of the man who was shot?'

He shook his head. 'It's not that,' he said. 'I have him on my conscience.' He broke off. 'It's a truism,' he said, 'but it's quite easy to come to terms with a bad conscience.'

'Then why are you afraid, Patrick?'

He looked at her. 'I've seen Inspector Kramer again,' he said.

Franziska moved her back away from the wall of the cabin. She didn't straighten it, she seemed rather to curl up with excitement.

'Where?' she asked. 'Here in Venice?'

He nodded.

'Patrick!' she said very quickly. 'Leave him in peace! It's not worth while. And it was thirteen years ago!'

But she saw to her horror that he wasn't listening. He looked at her abstractedly and almost happily. She became aware that he was turning back into the man she had caught sight of in the Danieli; he was no longer the man who had beckoned to her from the pier on the Riva degli Schiavoni, simply and without malice, the man with eyes full of the friendliness we feel for children and animals; he had changed, he was once more the little demon, the little grey-eyed devil looking out from behind the infernal molten-metal colour of the zinnias with an uninhibited stare, the satanic angel who could burn up a whole room in the focal point of his evil eye. *They are together in a cage called Venice, he and this great white figure of evil, who must be an albino, if his description is accurate. It will be an icy, silent murder in the dark.*

The she heard the waves splashing with soft, low blows against the side of the boat. Outside the porthole beside the chart of the lagoon the air turned grey, and a little later a red line was thrust into the grey from the left. Franziska stood up. She was suddenly shivering. She looked out through the porthole. The water came into sight, silvery grey, broken up into long, blurred lines.

'Day is breaking,' she said.

Translated from the German by Michael Bullock.

# The Coloured Cliffs

by David Hughes

In a certain age, millions of years ago, all the summers were inhumanly hot in these parts. Like this summer. The difference was that in those distant times no people existed on the Isle of Wight. There were no charabancs to descend on Alum Bay in mid-afternoon, no crocodiles of mystery sight-seers toured the cliff-paths. Ships never passed, only whales of a kind. And the seas were white as milk with their chalk deposits that would later rise miraculously into solid cliffs.

The voice droned above Lionel's head against the mutter of the incoming tide. He heard it all, believed none of it and almost at once forgot it. He had tried to use his father's voice to drown the dark sniffling of the sea as it pretended to lie calm and easy in the sunshine. But he could not block it out. Soon it would be swilling round his feet and he would have to run. Yet he stayed.

His seven years of life had taught him much. He knew the voice helped, whatever it seemed to be saying. But the fears remained. What would the sea do next? Turn white? Would whales come? Lionel shivered, twisting his spade in the sand. He seemed to be standing a long way from his family who were all gazing out to sea with wise lofty expressions, as though they knew something that he would never understand.

This was the first afternoon of the holiday, and Lionel had unwillingly filled his glass tube with coloured sands, scrabbling over the rainbow cliff-face with his back to the sea. Other boys had edged closer and stared and sniffed, then hopped away over the rocks. He had not made a friend yet. His family were anchored on the beach amid damp towels and gritty provisions. Time meant nothing on holidays. The sun was blinding, as if it would shine for millions of years without a change. The sea stirred like oil and flicked tongues of seaweed up the beach.

Lionel dropped his spade. A hunt, as at home – why not? He drifted towards the gully down which they had sauntered earlier and started climbing the sandy path between fat hedgehogs of gorse and the brittle heather. He bent to examine an outcrop of pink sand. The sound of the sea receded to a lull and a light breeze set up a hoarse whisper in the brambles. Lionel felt safe. He saw a butterfly.

The hunt was on. Lionel crouched low, patiently. He thought the butterfly would come nearer. It snickered away out of reach, described

an inaccurate circle round the boy, came to rest, waved wings at him, tumbled off the leaf and zigzagged higher. His eyes quietly followed it. Without a sound he shifted his cramped foot. His heart was thumping because he did not recognise the butterfly. It was unusual and very fat. The butterfly flirted a little closer, alighted, closed its wings coyly and appeared to die. A slow, hot, small hand moved out towards it, a killer that closed gently over its victim in the sunlight. The butterfly shivered once; the legs were suddenly tense on the leaf. The boy's fingers curled slowly round to enclose it, a shadow fell across its folded wings, and it was safe in his hand.

Then it broke out, too late, rasping his palm, softly hysterical. Lionel dared not look in case it escaped into the blue excited air. Would it suffocate now, quickly? They never had before, but this was a new kind, already drugged by the heat, and slow-witted to be trapped so easily. Lionel waited. He was sweating now that the chase was over. Then a voice, as if it were the butterfly, said to him: 'I saw you'.

He looked round dazedly. A girl of about his own age was looking at him with reproachful eyes. He felt she had no right to be there. He said nothing.

'I saw you,' she repeated.

Lionel said gloomily, 'I haven't done anything.'

'You stole that butterfly, it's in your hand.'

'No, I didn't.'

'Yes, you did.'

'What's your name?' said Lionel.

'Anita Rankin. What's your name?'

'Lionel.'

'I saw you,' said the girl. 'You've got it there, in your hand.'

'No, I haven't.' Lionel did not know how to change his position.

'Let me see it then.'

'I can't. It might get out.'

She nodded and came a step closer. Then she made a sudden quick dash at him and let out a little scream. Lionel did not flinch, but just moved his hand briskly behind him. The butterfly shuffled frantically and he could almost feel the dusty bloom of the wings adhere to his sticky fingers. 'Cruel,' said Anita, 'It's cruel.'

'I always hunt butterflies,' said Lionel with pride. 'I've got lots at home.'

'Oh,' said the girl. Then she said, 'Do you come here a lot?'

'I don't know,' said Lionel.

'You must know,' she said reasonably. 'Can't you come out tomorrow?'

Her blue eyes were small and piercing, and they made Lionel feel uncomfortable with the flagging butterfly in his hand. 'Yes,' he said after a pause.

'You can get some coloured sand for me,' said Anita conclusively. 'Climb up high.'

Lionel was nodding. He did not want to talk now, for he had glimpsed his family trudging heavily up the path below. His father was first to arrive and break the silence. He towered above Lionel, anger in his eyes. The boy was wrong to run off like that without a word. Anything might have happened to him . . .

'I was hunting,' said Lionel morosely.

'Is this what you caught?' said his father, pointing at the little girl.

Laughter followed, harsh adult laughter thundering above their heads, and all anger was dispersed. Lionel eased his clenched fist into his pocket and trailed up towards the guest-house. The girl drifted off. From the top you could command an awful expanse of sea, but you could hear none of it through the voices of guests and kitchen clatter, and the fear departed. A man could be master of the ocean from these shaggy heights where the stunted trees crouched away from the winds; the delicate foam spat harmlessly against the rocks below, and a little later a star came blinking out of the sky as secure as a nightlight.

All through supper the butterfly grizzled in a matchbox, and as soon as Lionel was tucked up safely in bed, he got up again, crept into his mother's room and found a pin, and then cautiously opened the matchbox. He squatted over it on the floor. The butterfly waved a feeler towards freedom, and Lionel pounced. The pin crunched unpleasantly through the thorax, making Lionel jump, then shudder. A feeble struggle took place. Lionel waited, victory within his grasp.

But the expected did not happen. There was no terrible last flutter and then death. On and on, more and more quickly, the wings battered

the sides of the box, the tiny head butted up and down like a bull about to charge, the legs chattered on the floor, the antennae raced and quivered. Lionel withdrew the pin and thrust it back in another place. The butterfly heaved convulsively, but jerked and fought with even madder violence. In Lionel's ears it came to sound like the hissing of a snake. He grew frightened. He wanted to call out. The butterfly seemed to get larger, to rise up the pin, to flutter hugely into the room. He took the pin tight in his fingers and lunged at the monster, at the vast blank eyeballs, at the hairy body that twitched this way and that, unnaturally. The pin sank in and out like a piston, and still the creature wrestled with life, as the dust of its brave colours shook off the wings and fell in a flurry of microscopic confetti around it. And still it was living, when Lionel, scared beyond all words, suddenly snapped the box shut and hurled himself into bed with a creaking of springs that left a long echoing nocturnal silence in the room. And in that silence, an almost inaudible muttering from the matchbox hidden by the dark.

He slept at last. A summer morning came. The butterfly was dead: with a small waxen bubble on its back where a little liquid had oozed out of the worst of its innumerable wounds. Lionel felt such a relief, as if he had dreamed about the cruelty all night. He put the box in his pocket and after breakfast went down to the beach. There was the sea in front of him. He had forgotten that.

The sea was slightly rougher. The wavelets snarled briefly before they broke and then grudgingly carried pebbles away in the undertow. His tall family came down to his level, horizontal, lying flat in the sun like statues. Their lips were tight and eyes shut against the sun. Down the cliff the decrepit irregular pillars of coloured sand looked less flamboyant in the morning shadows. The beach below, as chilly as pebbles, was still quite empty. Down his lonely no-man's-land between sea and cliff Lionel saw a small figure trailing towards him past the swathes of seaweed, now and then jumping the last gasp of a wave as it lapped at her feet. It was Anita. She had come for him, as promised.

'Look what I've found,' she said, and opening her clenched fist she allowed Lionel to inspect the small object coiled in her palm. It was not alive. It looked to him like a little chalky brooch, rather badly made, or it might have been a shell which the sea had washed bone-white.

'What is it?' he said without much interest.

'I dug it out of the cliff. Daddy says you can dig things out of the cliff that are years old. Before I was born this used to be alive. It was a snail.'

'It can't have been,' said Lionel curtly. 'It's all thick. It's just a stone.'

'But it's very nice. Would you like me to give it to you?'

Lionel examined the fossil more closely. It was plainly a shell of some sort, but it had gone hard and solid, probably because the cliff had trapped it or someone had buried it there. Lionel vaguely thought it was better to have it than let it go.

'Are there any more?' he said.

'Hundreds and hundreds. If you only look.'

The value of the ammonite diminished at once. But it remained a mystery. He shuddered at the thought of storms so violent that the seas could lash a fragile shell deep into the hard rock. The water was getting angrier all the time. It would happen again. Meanwhile he had something a bit strange in his pocket. In the other was the matchbox and he took it out. He had decided on an exhange: it was fair, and he did not want the butterfly now.

'Here,' he said, pushing it out to Anita.

She peeped into the box and opened it with a little cry of astonishment. She had not known what to expect. The butterfly's brilliance was dimmed, the wings hung loose at the side of a mutilated body, but somehow it still suggested the summer, a quiet fluttering in the sunlight, flowers of pink and yellow like the sand around them. She did not quite see death, only an absence of movement and light, freedom and air. 'Let it go,' she said.

'It's for you,' he said. 'I'm giving it as a present.'

'I shall let it free,' she said.

'You can't. It's dead.'

She opened the box wide and tried to toss the butterfly out. It stuck for a moment, then shook free and dropped quite fast to the sand. They both looked at it soberly. Then she started crying.

Lionel looked round. His parents lay flat under the sun. He began to walk away, then became faintly aware of a responsibility and turned back. Anita was kneeling down, still sobbing, as if praying. She scooped

a quick hollow in the sand, pushed the butterfly in with a shiver and covered it over. Lionel had pulled the white fossil from his pocket and was holding it silently out to her. She shaped a mound of sand over the burial and put two pebbles on top of it; then looked round for some seaweed to complete the grave. She was no longer crying, and Lionel quietly put away his fossil before she saw it. Now there was no sign of death except the matchbox lying upended against a stone. Anyone might have dropped it.

'It's all right now,' she said; then more severely, 'But don't ever do it again.'

'I collect butterflies,' said Lionel.

'Do you?' she said, as though a fresh subject had arisen to make them forget the incident.

'Yes, I've got a collection. Daddy says it's all right as long as you kill them quickly.'

'I wouldn't like to.'

'Girls don't collect butterflies,' said Lionel with a trace of contempt.

He was beginning to feel hurt and a little resentful that she had rejected his offer of the butterfly. He decided she was weak, just a girl who cried, half silly. He was wasting his time. But hearing the mutter of the sea, feeling the bite of the sun on his neck, he did not leave her. He would triumph yet.

'I know where you can get much bigger ones than this,' he said, taking the fossil out again.

'Where can you?'

'I know a place. I could get them for you if you wanted them.'

'Oh, where is it? Is it here?"

'I'll show you later. Not now. Too hot now.'

'Let's go for a swim then,' said Anita.

Lionel said nothing, but stared at the sea, then at the girl, and felt lonely. Not far away from him a wave swam up the beach, swilled round and faded into the sand. In the depths, a little way out, who knew what moved? Through the jagged rocks, in his direction, came fish that were colder than death. Lionel whispered some word which the girl did not hear. 'What?' she asked sharply.

'Don't want to,' he said.

'Oh, come on!'

'No,' he said.

'Then let's go and look for these things,' she suggested.

'Is it over there?' Lionel said, pointing to the cliffs.

'You said you knew.'

'Yes,' said Lionel.

He began to walk down the beach away from his family. The girl followed. At first his steps were uncertain. He was moving beyond the range of a shout, into mystery. Cries for help would avail him nothing. Yet still the girl meekly trailed along just behind him. He knew she was there, without looking. He grew calmer and began to swagger.

It was now almost as if he were by himself on this hulking island, with a sudden gift of courage behind him. Somehow he could put the sea out of his mind. Unlike his family, Anita did not want him to go in. He bent down and flung a pebble into the sea; it plopped harmlessly in the shallows. He let his feet carry him towards the high rearing cliff that would shortly divulge its treasures to the hunter. He was the hunter: wearing skins, armed, alert. He looked round and she was still there, picking her way. He began jumping lightly from rock to rock.

'Here's where I found it,' she said.

Lionel halted and glowered up at the rough elephantine grey of the cliff. A wriggle of water had cut a deep canyon into the clay and then dried up. He saw that you could climb by easy stages to a plateau half way up; then the cliff rose sheer and overhung perilously at the top.

'The big ones are higher,' he said. 'You wait here.'

He began to climb nimbly, growing hotter, out of breath, sustained by her approval of his daring. He scrambled on to the ledge and glanced dizzily down, the sea swayed and glittered, he felt a little sick, and the girl sat on a rock, chin cupped in hand, gazing up at his efforts. He suddenly lay flat on his face and there under his nose he saw scraps of white gleam in the clay. Why? He scratched at the clay with his fingers. A mystery. His curiosity, fully aroused, jerked him upright and put everything else out of his mind. His instinct had brought him to the right place. He pulled away a chunk of the brittle flaking substance and examined it intently. The jagged surface was specked with white fragments of shell, little buried twirls and broken fans. He pulled one away.

Chalk. He was on the right track. Now for a bigger one. He heaved, breathing hard, at a piece of rock that jutted out of the clay, pulled, jerked, and fell back clutching it. He found his balance again and peered into the stone. There, facing him, was a fish.

He could not believe it. A dead fish: not floating slackly on the sea, not on a fishmonger's slab, not spinning foolishly in a goldfish bowl, but in rock, hard, made of chalk, stone cold. How did it get there? When? Lionel worried a moment, then found he did not know. He accepted the fish. There it was in the rock, out of the past, inexplicable, undeniable. He held the stone aloft with an enormous sense of triumph. He had caught a fish. It was better than the small white shell he had in his pocket. He would catch others, white ageless fish locked in that chilly aquarium of stone. All his problems vanished. The girl below was responding to his shout: 'A fish! A fish!' And she was dancing, longing to see it, jumping for joy like the silly conquered sea that dashed up and down the pebbles of the shore. And Lionel began climbing higher.

Higher in the world, where clay turned suddenly to sand in the cliff formation, the gulls edged away from him off ledges, and swooped and cried. And Lionel clutched at crags of sand, scoring his fingers on the wiry grass that tufted them, and pulled his body higher. He missed his footing once and laughed. Could she hear him down there, could she see him now? The stretch of sea he suddenly glimpsed was at an absurd angle, like an overturned table he had kicked. Up here the atmosphere clutched at his lungs, the pocked sandstone blinked red in his eyes, and still he climbed, finding the lucky foothold, keeping his balance by the sheer glorious momentum of the upward chase. Somewhere above, waiting for his hands to close over it for ever, was the bigger fish, the giant to challenge him, the whale he would defeat, the fish that had rested in the poised death of the rock since before he was born. And so suddenly, almost without knowing it at his last gasp, his hands clutching like a drowning man, he found his own body flung on to the clifftop, where he was struck by a wind that blew through thick scented grasses, refreshing him at once.

He lay exhausted, hot and throbbing, glad. A rumour of thunder came dimly to his ears. He looked up at an intense cloudless sky. The sound rose in the depths of his ear, like the huge low thud of distant

guns. A faint haze of sand wafted past him and seemed to settle on the air. He blinked twice. The rumbling continued, far below, apparently in the heart of the cliff, and then there was an immense volcanic crash and the ground quaked under him. Sand rose fast and swirled round his head. He was suddenly alive, he elbowed his body to the edge of the cliff and looked over.

The sea had disappeared, veiled by a spreading cloud of sand. The beach could not be seen, but through the silence he heard cries, not gulls this time, but sharper, alarmed. Human cries. He stared down the face of the cliff, which had changed miraculously. The steep weathered channels which had brought him to the top, the jutting grasses, the sandy crockets carved by the wind, all these had vanished; and as if to show him what had so enormously happened a few moments before, a last fragment of sandstone broke away and scuttled down the smooth path of the landslide towards the invisible sea. The silence now was immense, flawed only by those distant cries, and although Lionel vaguely knew that he had provoked the disaster, he did not mind. He had escaped this huge natural revenge, and up here, alone in the high blue world, he felt the breezes fanning him. He was the hunter, the conqueror, the man.

Soon, with the stone fish weighting his pocket, he walked along the cliff until he came to an orthodox path leading to the beach. He did not hurry. He was a little anxious that his family might think he had been away too long. Somehow he felt that the girl had served her turn. He would show her the fish, his find, but without much pleasure. The pride was his own. He came along the foot of the cliff where a light mist of sand was still suspended in the air, darkening the sunlight to a strange dull amber. Round the place where he had begun his climb an outer ring of women, huddled as though for warmth, encircled a knot of men working, digging, burrowing into the sand. Lionel joined a group of spectators. A hand pushed him away. A voice said. 'Run back to Mummy, dear'. There was a muzzy silence. A child's spade hit rock. A man's voice shouted simply, 'Here!' And one or two of the women moved uncertainly closer.

Then Lionel saw a child's arm, loose and fractured, pulled out of the sand by the bending men, then a light lolling body with a bruised head

dangling to earth. He recognised his friend. He had been wondering where she had got to. He did not know she had been buried by all the sand. The men laid the girl down on the spot, and one of them squatted over her and began to pump her chest steadily. The silence deepened. Every fixed eye in the circle waited for movement, a sign of life, a quiet stirring of those useless limbs. There was none.

At length the squatting man rose, shrugged and turned away. Lionel saw that it was his father and then realised at once that there was nothing more to be done. He accepted the death, not as his fault, but almost as his due, like the butterfly which had refused to lie still and frightened him with its continuing life. Now it was buried in the sand under a neat grave where time was already turning it to stone. Soon it would be like the fish. In a minute, he felt, they would put the girl back into the hole and leave her face to harden into a chalky image. It all seemed quite reasonable.

A shadow fell. His father had seen him.

'Go back to your mother at once,' he said in a shaky voice.

'I'm collecting stones,' Lionel said, showing the small white ammonite in the palm of his hand.

'Don't ever come near the cliffs,' said his father.

'Why, Daddy?'

'I'll tell you when you're older. Now you must obey me.'

The god had spoken. Lionel trotted away down the beach. He was so hot and sandy that he felt he might step into the gently lapping water and cool off, if only his father, his face bronzed and kindly in the sun, would stand at the edge and watch him.

# A Question of Identity

by Janice Elliott

He stared thoughtfully over the greyish ruin of his oysters at the beautiful woman opposite. It must have been a good lunch. The bones of her ravaged chicken fringed her plate, polished and gleaming as if she had sucked them. The little tongue, remarkably pretty too, was dancing around in her mouth as she questioned the waiter, obviously anticipating already the joys of mousse. He felt an absurd jealousy of the dead, unfeeling chicken which must now be slipping down her throat, and into the lower, mysterious coils of her body; he envied the pile of yellow, flabby mousse, which must soon go the same way. Such a lovely throat would surely conceal the most exquisitely slender oesophagus. He was hopelessly distracted by the slim body, so fragile yet so voracious. He dropped his napkin and peered under the table at her ankles; they were perfect. The only catch in the whole situation seemed to be that he hadn't the faintest idea who she was.

He had lost his memory just as the last obedient oyster slid smoothly down his throat: he remembered its gentle passage, and then he forgot. He supposed she must be with him, and this was confirmed when she said: 'Darling, I think I'll have cream with my mousse.'

He was astonished by the speed with which his mind worked. Perhaps deprived of one important faculty, he would, like the blind, find his other senses remarkably sharpened. He took a quick glance into the mirror opposite. Dark, a little yellow, slightly Spanish he thought; interesting, rather unstable perhaps.

'You look as if you'd never seen your face before,' she laughed. Calm was vital. He knew that memory most often vanished after some fearful experience; such convenient facts seemed to be at his disposal. Perhaps he had committed a murder, and with this possibility in mind, he decided to extemporise. That face was sensitive. He might be important, or at least creative. He drew out his pen – he was pleased to find that it looked expensive – and doodled on the napkin. The results seemed to prove that he was not an artist.

'Darling, what are you doing?' she said. 'Do let me look. Oh, funny stick-men.'

He waved away a hovering waiter. It might be dangerous to eat any more in case he had an allergy. But coffee would be safe, and under the circumstances, a brandy. The dash of fire down his throat revived his

reason, and he realised that it was urgent to get away from the lovely creature. She wore a wedding ring, so he supposed she might be his wife. He probably had a job, because he didn't feel the kind of person who did nothing, so surely he could escape. It was half past two. But she could be his secretary. He risked an experiment.

'Darling, I must be off,' he said.

She raised her lovely eyes in reproach:

'Oh not yet. After all this is a special occasion.'

There was a hint of conspiracy in her voice, not unpleasant. There must be some bond between them, and if this were true, there would be some record on him of where to find her. There was a Champagne bottle on the table, in a bucket, and he peered into it to determine how much he had drunk. The fellow in the glass looked quite sober, but it would be as well to check up.

'Darling, you know we finished it. You said it wasn't the best year.' Some other man, in some other world, might have passed this verdict on the pretty green bottle. He looked at the label, and was relieved to find himself agreeing with this dead or wandering spirit. Obviously some specialised powers were left to him, he was cut off, perhaps mercifully, from only part of his life. It was tempting to follow this companion wherever she might lead him, but it might be safer to retreat to the gentlemen's lavatory.

In the tiled peace of the lavatory he made a pretence of washing his hands. Should he go back and admit his disability? There must have been some deviousness and some independence in his character, because he decided on secrecy for a while. He went into one of the cubicles, and secure at last – at least for the time being – felt it was his home. The tiles in there were the green of young leaves, and a vision passed across his brain of a child climbing a tree to a secret refuge of foliage, this colour, and a voice calling in the orchard below, weak and ridiculous because he was safe. He tried for a moment to put a face to the voice, but a depth of leaves seemed to interrupt. He sank back on the lavatory seat as if onto a welcoming branch, and drew out his wallet. At least he had money – fifty pounds; there was a photograph in the wallet, not the beautiful woman possibly waiting for him still at their table, but a tired anxious face, to which he attributed the voice in the orchard. There

were several cards, one printed with a name and address in the City, six engraved with the same name, James Drummond, and an address in Hampstead. Not a bad name. A few minutes later a figure dropped from the window in a quiet streek off St. James's, landed on a dustbin, and called a cab.

'Just cruise around a bit,' he said.

'These nobs,' thought the cabbie, 'don't know where they're going,' and set off round the Park.

Purposely, he had dinner that evening in a crowded restaurant. He had booked in at Browns, and on the way to dinner bought a newspaper. If he had done something regrettable, it would be as well to know; if he were famous, it might be amusing to find out. But the porter acknowledged his luggage – bought hastily in Piccadilly – with just enough civility and no recognition at all. This impression was confirmed by the paper.

In the restaurant he revelled. He found he enjoyed dining alone, and wondered if this had been a pleasure denied him in the past. At the next table, a couple were quarrelling, a thin, taut pretty girl, and a compact hopeless man. Physically they seemed made for each other, and it was pleasant to think how he was now exempt from this torture; he seemed to know something, in his forgotten memory, of unions which by every physiological and chemical rule should have been perfect, and by human weakness were a prison. He wondered if he was in love with the woman at lunch, but surely there would have been some pull in his body or mind, out of memory, that would not have allowed him to leave by way of the gentlemen's lavatory? He cherished his secret freedom.

The next day he walked around, observing peacefully the hurried crowds. Each member wore on its face a label of haste or desire, or futility. They had all come from something, and were impelled in their progress to return to it, or to pass on. At first he had avoided policemen but now he brazened it out, and was interested to see that his face set off no chase; he was to be left in peace. Perhaps his connection with the woman of yesterday was not, after all, respectable. It was diverting to think that she might have been his mistress, and was but now waiting for the telephone to ring. In the public library he looked for himself in *Who's Who,* and in the *Classified;* it appeared he was neither a peer of the

realm, an actor nor a member of the directly useful professions. He tried a small experiment in the bank – there was a cheque book in his hip pocket.

'Wife and family doing well,' he offered, 'how's yours?' to the clerk who accepted his cheque without question. The matter of signature had been tricky, but a stiff right arm got over that; there was after all no risk – he had still his own face – though the clerk did not look up.

'Having no wife, sir,' replied the clerk, 'I don't have the pleasure of a family.'

The City address he had found in his wallet turned out to be a high building wedged between the great new structures that had sprouted from the ruins. He guessed this was his office, as the name he had taken to be his own was engraved with the address on the card. He had made himself unrecognisable with a pair of enormous sunglasses and a tropical hat, sufficiently out of character, he felt, to conceal his identity. Crouching on a cool stone in the ruins of a graveyard, he watched the office. A man was strolling backwards and forwards behind the window, obviously dictating, peering out now and then directly at the figure on the gravestone. It was amusing to consider what an uproar would have been set up if he had been recognised.

It was late afternoon, and after half an hour's wait black-suited workers emerged, clutching their umbrellas under the cloudless sky, their faces shadowed by bowler hats. The occasional girl brought a flash of colour with a brilliant summer dress, and while the men moved at a quick but precise pace, the women ran, like bright little animals released from a cage. Several of the men held bulging briefcases under their arms. He wondered if he had been one of these, and suspected he had. A small squadron of these ant-like black figures, shadows moving within the shadows, broke off, and filed neatly into a pub on the corner.

He crept closer to the office and peered in. A notice was affixed discreetly by the entrance: 'Dwyer and Drummond.' So he was a partner; just then he heard steps down the stairs, and leant back against the wall, his hat pulled down over his eyes. This must be Dwyer, his briefcase was even more pregnantly bulging, his suit somehow blacker, his umbrella more perfectly furled. He looked worried, which under the circumstances was hardly surprising, but the troughs of anxiety cut in his face

seemed permanent. He reminded one of an undertaker. Then, surprisingly, Dwyer smiled to himself, almost giggled, and gave his briefcase a little pat. He wavered for a moment outside the pub, then with a shake of the head, walked off and was lost in the blinding sunset.

The next day there seemed to be an unusual amount of movement in the hotel.

'Not going off for the holiday, sir?' said the reception clerk. Of course it must be the Saturday of August Bank Holiday; he had looked up the date in the newspaper, but this never occured to him. Out in the street the city was emptying; cars, loaded with luggage, were nosing their way to the sea or the country. Until he realised it was August, the peak of the summer, the heat had seemed pleasant; now it was insufferable.

He understood now the tug there had been from the beginning, or rather from the beginning of memory. He had stood at Swan and Edgar and watched the buses lumbering away to bear their great load north. Once he had joined the queue, but he had realised that in the new routine he had made for himself, it was time for a drink.

Now he found himself panting, like a dog, on the leather seat of a taxi.

'Hampstead' he said; and looking at the card in his wallet, 'Laurel Road.'

It was good beyond his expectation. Hot with the unfamiliar pressure of the midday sun (his body, faithful in other respects, did not seem to recall the possibilities of temperature), he swayed under the incredible greenness of Laurel Road. He paddled in the pools of shadow under the trees and stared back at a couple who walked, warmly entwined, sweating and oblivious. He leant against the thin towny trunk of a tree, and observed his house.

He saw two children in the garden and instinct recognised them as his own; dizzily he observed a fair head lean from the window to call them in, wearing, out of sight, the ankles he had studied. He found himself divided by the strangest feelings. Inside the house there would be recognition, objects to force their familiarity on him, evidences of a past. There would probably be faces of delight and identification; doubtless some reproach too, but it seemed impossible that he had performed an act which could cut off his welcome, for he was getting to know the man whose clothes he wore and felt pretty certain there was

no blood on his hands. Yet it would be possible, though not easy against the currents which drew him to the house, to leave James Drummond behind for good. He wondered who had kept that garden so neat, who had made the decision to paint the front door yellow, what were the names of the children.

Suddenly the girl, for no reason he could see, let out a wail and, sitting down in the flower-bed, began to cry with great gulping, unendurable sobs; the boy, who was older, planted himself stolidly before her, apparently unmoved. It was difficult not to rush in and console her, but he pressed his body back against the tree. After a few minutes the terrible screams ceased as abruptly as they had begun, and the child began methodically to pull off the petals of a rose one by one, cramming them into her podgy fist. The boy now joined in, working his way towards her from the other end of the bed; when they had collected enough for their private and mysterious purpose, they scrabbled a hole in the soil, and dug the squashed petals in, pressing the earth down with thumps of the fist. The job of destruction done, they forgot it immediately, and he wondered how, as a father, he would have behaved. The boy, who had his own dark colouring, looked impervious to punishment, wirily resistant. The girl, small and fair, seemed too fragile for reproach, but he supposed he must have been able to handle them, though the thought, from where he now stood, was terrifying. Was the pleasure of seeing before you always the witness of your own existence, worth this pain?

Still, when evening came, he knew he would go into the house, and accept whatever identity waited for him. In the dusk the house, with its yellow door and neat lawn, was seductive, the idea of the woman inside with her soft voice and pale hair, even more attractive, desirable enough to blot out the black-suited figure in a high room in the City.

When the sun had set and the house swallowed up the children, to enclose them under cool sheets in a dark room, the man in the shadows moved from under the trees, and began in a strange trot to run up the path. He paused to peer down at the roses; their roots were still secure and they would bloom again. He pushed open the front door, and memory returned with the picture on the wall, which he knew he had never liked, the soft voice calling from the kitchen, which he now understood had, after its first enchantment, bored him for many years,

drained him with its monotony until, on their tenth anniversary, his tired mind made its escape. But James Drummond shut the door behind him.

# Luther: a portrait

by E. M. Cioran

To have faith is not everything – not even enough; you must also endure it like a curse, seeing in God an enemy, an executioner, an ogre, yet loving Him nevertheless, assigning Him all the inhumanity you can muster, can imagine . . . The Church turns Him into an easy-going figure of fun; Luther protests: God, he declares, is neither the 'simpleton', the 'meek spirit' nor the 'cuckold' proposed to our veneration, but a 'devouring fire', a fury 'more terrible than the Devil', who loves to torment us. Not that Luther has any hesitation about paying his respects. On occasion he berates God, treating him as his peer: 'If God fails to protect me and to save my honor, the shame will be His.' He knows how to kneel, to humble himself, but he also knows how to be insolent, to supplicate in the tones of provocation, to shift from sighs to reproaches, to pray in *polemics*. For him any term will serve to worship or to curse, even the coarsest. Calling God to order, Luther has given a new meaning to humility, setting up an exchange between the miseries of the Creator and those of His creatures. An end to piety, and to emasculated doubt. Even a minimum of aggressiveness is enough to reawaken faith: God ignores mealy-mouthed appeals; He prefers to be summoned, jostled, enjoying with His own those very misunderstandings the Church exerts itself to dispel. Rome, monitoring the *style* of its flock, intercepts Heaven, which reacts only to imprecations, to abuse, to expressions defying the censorship of theology or good taste, or even the control of reason itself . . .

As for what reason is worth, don't ask the philosophers, for it is their job to husband and protect it. To penetrate its arcana, turn instead to

those who know reason to their cost and in the flesh. It is not an accident that Luther calls reason a whore. By nature and function, reason *is* a whore, surviving by simulation, versatility and shamelessness. Stopping at nothing, since it *is* nothing, reason gives itself to each man, and each man may claim it as his own: the just and the unjust, the martyr and the tyrant. There is no cause reason does not serve, putting all on the same plane, without reticence, without predilection; the first-comer obtains its favors as the last. Only the naive still proclaim it our greatest possession. Luther has exposed it for what it is. Of course, not everyone has been granted the privilege of a visit from the Devil.

*

Minds that hurl themselves into temptation, living on intimate terms with the Evil One, fleeing him only to find him . . . 'I wore him,' Luther says, 'hanging around my neck, 'he slept beside me, in my bed, more often than my wife.' He even reaches the point of wondering 'if perhaps the Devil is not God.'

Far from being a haven, Luther's faith was a self-induced shipwreck, eagerly sought after, a danger which flattered and exalted him in his own eyes. Pure, religion would be sterile; what is profound and virulent in it is not the divine but the demoniacal. And the attempt to spare it the Devil's society would render it anaemic and mawkish, would degrade it. To believe in the reality of salvation you must first believe in the reality of the Fall: every religious act begins with the perception of hell – the raw material of faith – heaven comes only *afterwards,* a kind of corrective, a consolation: a luxury, a superfetation, an accident required by our bias in favor of symmetry and balance. Only the Devil is *necessary.* The religion that dispenses with the Enemy debilitates itself, grows sterile, becomes a vague, querulous piety. The man who seeks salvation at any cost will never have much of a religious career.

The virtue of the Reformation was to have troubled Europe's sleep, rejecting the Roman tranquillizers and opposing the image of a benevolent God and a mediocre Satan with that of an equivocal divinity and an omnipotent Devil. As Luther knew, the concept of predestination is profoundly immoral. All the more reason for him to support and promote it. His mission was to shock, to scandalize the mind, aggravate its

pangs and drive it to impossible hopes – in a word, to *lower the number of the elect*. He had the honesty to admit that on certain points he yielded to the Adversary's suggestions. Which accounts for his temerity in condemning the majority of believers. Was he trying to disconcert? Undoubtedly. The cynicism of prophets reconciles us to their doctrines, and even to their victims . . .

★

Despite his incapacity to hope, Luther nevertheless personifies the emancipator; more than one liberal movement derives directly from him. This is because he proclaims God's absolute sovereignty only to abase any other form of authority. 'To be a prince,' he says, 'and not be a pirate is almost impossible.' Fine as the maxims of sedition are, those of heresy are finer still. If Europe can be construed by a succession of schisms, if its glories are nothing but a train of heterodoxies, it is Luther we have to thank for it. Ancestor of scores of innovators, he nevertheless had the advantage over them of not yielding to optimism, the vice that dishonors so many revolutions. Closer than we are to the sources of Sin, he could not avoid the fact that to free a man does not necessarily mean to save him.

★

Tossed back and forth between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, torn by contradictory impulses and convictions, this Rabelais of *angst* was the ideal man to breathe new life into a fainting, fading Christianity. Only Luther knew what measures to take to deepen its colors: his piety was *black*. Even Pascal's, even Kierkegaard's pale beside his: the former too much a writer, the latter too much a philosopher. But Luther, with the strength of his peasant neurasthenia, possessed the instinct necessary to collar both the forces of Good and those of Evil. Unceremonious, savory, his coarseness is never offensive. There is nothing false about him, nothing of the classic apostle: neither scholarly hatred nor studied vehemence. In the off-handedness of his terrors sounds a note of humor: precisely what was lacking among the promoters of the Cross. Luther? A humanized Paul.

Translated by Richard Howard.

SIX DRAWINGS OF

# NEW YORK

FAIRFIELD PORTER

ALEX KATZ

The subject of painting is space and cities very definitely participate in this space. Cities are another type of landscape. A shoe can be a landscape. The landscape is wherever people are, painting.

But we have difference, of course. The important one in Manhattan's countryside is an absence of true season and discernible weather. Cycles of its sun are unreliable when bare streets reflect forsythia, pussywillow and violets in the windows of florists December first and when certain grocers supply fresh asparagus all the year. Its buildings are the tallest in the world. The sky is very fragmentary, the pieces, more often than not, clouded with industrial waste, not blueness, fall with smog, not rain. Manhattan's climate happens in newsprint or provides the radio

LARRY RIVERS

occasion. This leaves the passions alone. One doesn't sigh at unseen cloud effects, one quietly, often uniquely (personality in painting is its intellect) picks up paper with no other reason than that of keeping the ligaments loose and working. But beyond the absence of season there is a greater one of time as well when buildings rise and fall unreasonably – the lunacy of 'planners' and the presumption of architects who think that the privilege of building carries with it a complete knowledge of human aspiration. The Brooklyn Bridge is being 'modernized'. It is hard then to return for comparison to the sighted familiar to see what others have done and what, years ago, one did oneself. Drawing concrete trees of glass or steel cambium, whose growth and ageing is

Jane
Frederick

RUDY BURCKHARDT

ELAINE DE KOONING

erratic and constant, is always to begin as if for the first time. The city has got to be studied and learnt. Just as if it were 'real' or 'natural' nature.

This new scenery very much continues the primary definition of landscape: 'A portion of land which the eye can comprehend in a single view, especially in its pictorial aspect.' The more limited the view the more particular it may be. Even in fields the eye makes fences. The trained eye has usually the higher enclosure and to it every shape is a thing of moment and interest and the predominance of angularity does not flatten interest. The city is as quick as wind in grass – children turn corners whirling hoops and throwing balls. In the evening there are lights. The new fluorescences of Manhattan have lovely curves. And then there is the studio window itself and its separate measure. Burckhardt has a new painting of grape ivy in his, Katz a folding chair, while through Porter's amble trucks. Like livestock.

Robert Dash

## NOTES ON THE PAINTERS

Fairfield Porter's paintings have had a wide influence for more than a quarter of a century. Critic-at-large for the *Nation,* he has written a definitive text on Thomas Eakins. Represented by Tibor de Nagy.

Alex Katz received great critical acclaim following an exhibition at the Stable Gallery in the spring of 1960. He is also a member of the Tanager Gallery, a distinguished co-operative enterprise, and is currently visiting art critic at Yale University.

Larry Rivers is one of New York's most gifted painters. He has also distinguished himself in sculpture, jazz, poetry and art criticism. (de Nagy)

Jane Freilicher, New York born schooled, is one of America's foremost painters. (de Nagy).

Rudy Burckhardt's photographs of artists at work and his experimental films are part of New York's art history. Some of his paintings were shown in the autumn of 1960 at the David Herbert Gallery.

Elaine de Kooning, sturdy member of the New York school, is also one of its more articulate spokesmen.

ALFRED ANDERSCH, born in Munich 1914; imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp in 1933 for activities in the Bavarian Communist Youth Organization. This period, and his desertion to the United States troops on the Arno front are described in his book, *Die Kirschen der Freiheit* (1952). Has written a number of radio plays, novels and collections of short stories, including *Flight to Afar* published in Britain and America in 1958. Now living in Switzerland.

JEREMY BROOKS is a young English poet and novelist. He also contributes critical articles on books and the theatre to the *New Statesman,* the *Guardian,* and other papers. Has published two novels, *The Water Carnival* and *Jampot Smith.*

MARY CECIL trained as a musician before turning to writing. She has written two novels, articles for *Encounter, Punch, New Statesman,* etc. and now lives in Hampstead, London, working on a third novel.

E. M. CIORAN was born in Rumania in 1911, the son of a Greek Orthodox priest. He studied philosophy at the University of Bucarest from 1929-1932 and has lived in Paris since 1937. His philosophical writings, Precis de Decomposition (1949); *Syllogismes de l'amertune* (1952); *La Tentation d'Exister* (1956) and *Histoire et Utopie* (1960) have had very considerable influence in France. He is also the author of a book on Joseph de Maistre (1957)

ROBERT DASH, who here introduces the six New York painters, is himself a painter as well as a poet and art critic.

JANICE ELLIOTT has worked for several magazines since she graduated from Oxford and is now on the staff of the *Sunday Times.* Previous stories of hers have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar.*

WILLIAM FAULKNER is, of course, the famous American novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949.

DIANA GARDNER is a well known English writer of short stories and has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies in Britain and America. She has published a collection of stories, *Halfway down the Cliff* and a novel, *The Indian Woman.*

DAVID HUGHES has worked in an editorial capacity on the staffs of the *London Magazine,* two book publishers and *Man about Town,* of which he is now editor. He is the author of two novels, *A Feeling in the Air* and *Sealed with a Loving Kiss,* also of a study of the work of J. B. Priestley.

GEORGE MACBETH was born in Scotland in 1932 and was educated at King Edward VII School, Sheffield and New College, Oxford. He works as a talk producer for the B.B.C. Third Programme and is the author of a book of poems *A Form of Words* (1952).

JOHN W. MALONE is 22, a graduate of Andover and a senior at Harvard. He ha another story appearing in the *Evergreen Review*.

RAYMOND OLIVER was born in Arlington, Mass. in 1936, attended Phillip Academy, Andover and has B. A. and M. A. in German literature and philology Is at present living in Munich on a German government award. These "trans positions" from Walther are his first work to appear in print, except for some contributions to college literary journals.

MARGE PIERCY was formerly a student at the University of Michigan where she won a Hopwood Award. She is at present working on a novel.

PAUL RAMSEY teaches at Elmira College, was raised in Georgia and Tennessee Has published a good deal of poetry and has a book on literary criticism, *The Lively and the Just*, coming out with the University of Alabama Press.

RICHARD ROMAIN has just returned to New York after living for some time in France. *The Gypsy Girl* is his first published story.

SHIRLEY SCHOONOVER studied writing with Karl Shapiro and has been published in *New Campus Writing*. She is currently finishing a novel and a volume of short stories.

HENRY VAN DYKE graduated from the University of Michigan where he won a major Hopwood Award for his novel, *The End of the Bazaar*. He is now living in New York and working on another novel.

PETER VIERECK is a well known American poet. His latest volume of poems The Tree Witch has just appeared.

EUGENE WALTER lives in Rome and is well known as poet, novelist and editor

# ORDER FORM

To Transatlantic Review

Box 3348 Grand Central Station, New York, 17, N.Y.

33 Ennismore Gardens, London, s.w.7

or to .....

(Bookseller)

Please send me a copy of Transatlantic Review, price $ 1.00 or 6s.

Please enter me as a subscriber for one year I enclose P.O./cheque for

Subscription rates: four issues yearly $ 3.50 or £ 1. Postage extra.

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE

WILLIAM FAULKNER

HENRY VAN DYKE

SHIRLEY SCHOONOVER

JEREMY BROOKS

MARY CECIL

DAVID HUGHES

PETER VIERECK

GEORGE MACBETH

PAUL RAMSEY

ALFRED ANDERSCH

EUGENE BERMAN